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THE LIGHT OF COLD-HOME FORD.

By MAY CROMMELIN.

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"NEW YORK"

George Munro

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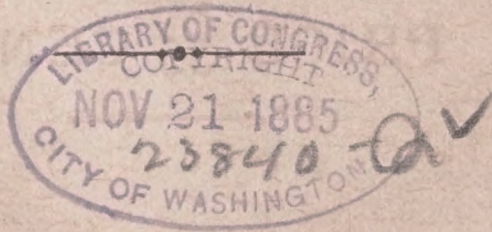
THE LIGHT OF COLD-HOME FORD.

A NOVEL.

✓
By MAY CROMMELIN.

“How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.”

Merchant of Venice.



NEW YORK:

GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,

17 TO 27 VANDEWATER STREET.

1885

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JOY.

CHAPTER 1.

"Whan that Aprille with his schowres swoote
The drought of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertue engendered is the flour."

CHAUCER.

A NARROW glen ended in a little waterfall; above and beyond it the moors stretched brown and unbroken by fences for miles, under the broad and benignant light of a spring sky.

It was a solitary spot. The nearest dwelling was a farmhouse, nearly two miles away. The only human beings who passed there might be a stray shepherd coming down from the moorland by the path to the ford; or, more seldom still, a distant farmer riding up to see his herds of roaming, half-wild red cattle and branded ponies. Nevertheless, there was a little human home here.

Close against a high rock at the glen's mouth was a small cottage of gray moorstone, with a deep thatched roof and a little rounded porch rudely made of rubble and plastered with mud. The brown-roofed cottage was built against the weather-worn cliff, much, indeed, as the house-martins' nests of dried clay found shelter under its own eaves. It looked so lonely, dropped down there in the wilderness, in spite of its guardian rock! No wonder that when the shepherd, for whom it was first built, died, and the cottage was deserted, the passing peasants, shunning after nightfall those deserted walls, perhaps infested by bogies, gave it the nickname of Cold-home. Besides, there were ill tales told, on winter nights in the more cheerful little homes round, of wayfarers who had been drowned in the river close by where it stood.

The Chad had its tiny well-spring far away up on the hills in the heather. Thence it flowed softly through the moorland, unconscious of growing strength, till all at once, coming to a leap down a rock-ledge, it laughed out loud. After which, down and down it plunged, with gargling music, in a strong rush of water foaming down into the heart of the glen, beneath overshadowing birches and oaks steeply rooted among the rocks, whose interlocked branches hid out the sunshine. Once below, after whirling round and round in a deep pool, the Chad rushed swiftly on. Its rock-bound channel was often blocked amid-stream by great boulders, seeming flung there by giants at play, and once used as altars by the Druids for human sacrifice, said some wise folk. It flowed past all these, still carrying air-bells and foam-sprays on its clear, brown flood, darkening sometimes in shadowed, deep pools, and again frolicking with

many smiles over gravelly shallows, as if uncertain how to behave itself toward mother earth; till at last, taking existence easily, it wound in accommodating pleasantness by primrose slopes, and through buttercup meadows, in the low, rich lands that stretched from the breezy, upland wolds of its cradle to the far sea.

Some of those dark pools near the waterfall were dangerous enough, their edges being often wet and slippery with spray. But worse than these was a broad, sun-kissed one, so deceitfully clear you should swear your three-foot ashen staff could touch the shining, seemingly shifting bottom; and yet tradition told that a strong peddler, renowned at fairs for his wrestling prowess, and a favorite with his women customers, missing the ford one dark night, and stepping in here close by, was drowned. And thence the spot was called the Deadman's Pool. The ford was just opposite the cottage, which stood but a little way off; and this being the only safe crossing-place for some distance up and down the Chad, needs must that the few wayfarers should come thereby, and, if wise, before night-fall.

Cold-home Cottage was no longer empty, however, at the time this story begins. And *this*, the beginning, is on an evening more than a quarter of this century back. It was also the time of year of "April that messenger is to May."

Very thin smoke rose faintly from the cottage chimney. Not a cow, pig, cat, or other animal was to be seen near, except a solitary she-goat tethered among the bushes; no hens or ducks clucked and quacked on the threshold. In the miners' huts away on the other side of the moors one heard all day long the cries of romping, half-wild children, the rough voices, often raised in scolding, of wives and mothers. Ragged garments were always being dried on the loose stone walls, and if a stray mallow or larkspur bloomed by the crazy door, it only looked down-trodden and miserable.

But this little brown house was as clean and sweet as a nut. Grass grew thick up to the solitary path that led to the porch which seemed crushed under its thatched roof, yet a honeysuckle and a rose twined round its entrance. The silence inside and around was so intense one could hear the calls and cries of the wild creatures and birds on the moor above; these and the constant sound of falling water among the rocks and alders up the dark glen. It seemed simply a moorman's hut. A rude herdsman might come home here to sleep after spending his days out on the heathery hillsides, watching his flocks of straying, active sheep, with an occasional eye to the shaggy, half-wild ponies or the more domesticated red cattle.

The door opened this evening, and two dark women figures came out into the porch. They paused a moment, and, as if from habit, looked first across the stream at the track leading from the moors to the ford near their door, and then down the widened valley into the cultivated fields and meadows. Nothing—no living human being to be seen.

Then both stepped out and walked silently toward the river's edge, as if also from unconscious habit. They wore odd-looking capes, with hoods almost entirely concealing their faces, and black gowns of coarse serge, just long enough to escape touching the ground, and that fell in severe folds around them. Yet any passer-

by with a quick eye for beauty might perhaps have detected that both women had unusually well shaped figures under those homely, awkwardly made gowns. One, who was the smaller of the two, seemed more soft and plump in her natural curves than her companion; the other had a grand gait, a tall, even commanding figure.

As they reached the brink of the Chad and sat down absently under the fresh, green alders, finding resting-places among the mossy rocks lying scattered around, the hood of the taller silent being fell a little back. She was a beautiful woman. Her eyes were dark and rather long, with a deep, inward look as of one absorbed in thought, while her strong figure seemed meant for action.

Her forehead was ample and finely shaped, framed in heavy bands of jet-black hair. Her nose was somewhat prominent, but, with the great sweetness of her mouth, only added to her whole air of firmness wedded to gentleness; and, as might have been expected from the rest of her appearance, her throat was full and massive, a sign of mental as of bodily strength. She might have been a Catholic saint, living in austerity in a desert; she might have been a Judith, her deed of patriotic deliverance done.

One might at least imagine that some great unspoken, almost unutterable, sorrow had taken up its home for life in her heart, and could dimly be seen through her eyes—the soul's windows. But it was no living sorrow, rather the ribs of a wreck that now rested in a hushed sea of love—of peace. Looking at her still smile, one could well believe that no murmurs ever crossed those lips.

Who was this woman? What was she doing in these moors? How had she won that expression of great calm which many a saint might hardly have reached after years of struggle? No one for miles around could have told.

She sat upright on a solitary stone, her hands clasped round her knees, her head raised as if she liked to feel the wide, moorland breeze blowing upon her temples. The other, who was her sister, lay beside her resting against a tree trunk, as if seeking ease; and she shivered slightly at times in the mild air, while her hood was drawn close over light, curling, fair hair.

Her wide, turquoise eyes wandered earthward over the mossy carpet at her feet, seeming to see curiously every fresh, green frondlet of the new spring, and each withered leaf of last year's prime rolled up like a tiny brown parchment fallen from Nature's great book.

It was a charming and secluded nook. The little river brawled down among the rocks, and spread into a deep, dark pool before them. The weather was a mingling of warmth and moisture, sun and shower, as befitted the time of year. Thorns were all bursting into the fresh leaf-buds called in olden days "ladies' meat." The birches were like a green-dotted haze, suspended in the air, while below their stems shone as silver pillars. Elms put out their belated, rougher buds in a defiant manner; but the horse-chestnuts were everywhere generously unfolding five little, joined leaflets like babe-fingers, that would be spread, when warm June came, into a broad shelter for the heat.

Half an hour passed, and neither of the two quiet sitters had stirred. Neither had spoken a word.

The sun had moved, however, and now sent golden beams

through the trees over the river. Up rose thereat a little swarm of dancing flies, seen clearly in the bright, low light. Down darted some hawking swallows in arrowy glancings. A few house-martins followed in more fluttering flight, eager to fill their beaks for the tender, gaping bills of the callow nestlings under the eaves of the little brown house yonder. They flitted to and fro between it and the hunting-ground with ceaseless energy. Twitter! twitter! as they flew; still they came and went.

Then the taller woman stirred a little, smiled, and said, in a deep but sweet tone,

"Yea, the swallow hath found her a nest. Well, even our poor home may be a temple to the Lord of Hosts when the incense of prayer and praise is offered up in it. Look at the row of mud nests under the porch now, Magdalen. Three more since yesterday." (She was glancing at their brown hut, which was only a little distance away, and she had very long eyesight.) "They remind me of the mud hovels in Egypt that we used to see plastered against the ruined temples."

Strange words to be said in this remote English moorland, far from the likely haunts of traveled beings; and spoken, too, by any one inhabiting that rude cottage with its cob porch. What was more strange was, that this woman had also the refined speech of a gentlewoman of education, and—what many ladies have not—a voice so singularly musical that it resembled often the sounds of an Æolian harp.

CHAPTER II.

"Spring, like Love,
Doth stir a sad, sweet trouble in the heart."

THE woman called Magdalen started, with a quick, nervous movement, as her sister spoke. She had not been thinking, however; but, in a sort of restless silence, had been amusing herself, with trifles, like a child, or lying with eyes almost closed in a half-sleep. Ten minutes ago she had descried two ants hurrying hitherward, and had amused herself ever since laying twigs and leaves in their path. Poor, small insects, so full, doubtless, of duties and anxieties. She vexed them, she knew it! and smiled with a sort of almost infantile malice in her pretty face; for, though worn, her features were very pretty. But, once startled from this noiseless, secret sport, she looked up sharply and listened.

"Egypt! I was never there like you. But I have traveled too. I could tell you of mud huts in South America—and in Mexico. Ah! that was a life—always gayety, excitement, and change!—change!"

She stopped and laughed; just two happy notes ending in one more so sharp and discordant that the darker sister turned and looked at her with a comforting glance. Magdalen's eyes, light blue as forget-me nots, now wandered wearily over the landscape around. There rose sweep after sweep of brown moor, hill behind hill, each standing shoulder to shoulder, none much higher than his brethren, but many topped with tors—giant crowns of rock jutting out in strange, different shapes.

"*They* never change," she murmured pettishly, yet almost as if she did not wish her complaint overheard. "There they are, that ugly mask-head, like a sphinx, and the castle one and all the rest. Oh, I am tired of them." (Now, to be reasonable, why should the hills change their faces?)

"Magdalen, they *do* change," said the other woman, tenderly. Both spoke in the peculiar conscious tone of persons who seldom did talk; but this one especially as if words were living symbols, each to be thoughtfully chosen, though from her gentleness this seemed not pedantic, and she was herself unaware of it. "Yes, they change. Why, every hollow on the moor is bright green now, though we are too far off here to see. And already, every here and there, you can see some gorse in flower, but presently up behind our cottage to the hill-brow will be one yellow blaze of sweet blossom, and, as old Dunbar says, the skies will 'ring with shouting of the larks.'"

Magdalen could hardly be said to reply, but in an inconsequent way she lilted to herself the old saying,

"When the gorse is out o' bloom,
Kissing's out o' favor."

"Then, dear, think of the summer coming, and the warm days you are so fond of, and the long, twilight evenings on the hills. The heather will come out in bloom, but first the meadows down by Farmer Berrington's will be full of mowers, and then comes harvest. But the hills are lovely already. Look at that change—"

A dark blue shadow passed rapidly over the fair hill-range that was a steep barrier to the opposite valley. Ten seconds! it was gone like a past dream, and the whole hillside laughed in clear sunlight. Another dream is coming, its dark point pushing forward—on, on, but this wave lower than the last, the crest of the ridge and each jutting point still bright above it against the soft, blue sky. So, dreaming and waking, now above, now below, chasing and still returning, sunshine and shadow played upon the hilly moorland.

As she had said, it was lovely!

Magdalen looked, and impatiently burst out, as if she could not endure the view,

"Yes, Rachel, they do change, and we can't. And they don't change, but stand always, always there, and I hate them for it! Summer coming, you say! Why, that is the very time when we should be enjoying ourselves, be gay, be happy."

She made a little movement with her arms, as if indicating the motion of a dance; the merest abortive sign, instantly subsiding. Then, with a plaintive passion, she went on,

"How many human beings have we seen this past week? One shepherd coming down that far path."

"Do we want to see human creatures?" said the other sister, with an inexpressible tone, as if a depth of sadness lay beneath, but was not stirred.

"No, no, no! But still, what are our lives worth? We might as well be brutes."

"You forget the two lives our lantern may have saved last Saturday market-night."

"The lantern, yes; is that all we are good for, to help tipsy boors from a ducking?"

"No; human souls from drowning. Come, Magdalen, you know well enough that if the ford is low to-night, and the stones plain to see, still how often, after a freshet, any one passing in the dark might easily lose their lives, like those before them, in the Dead-man's Pool."

"I do know. I am glad to help. You know that. Still, still—" Magdalen's voice died away as she seated herself low on the grass, with her arm under her head, apparently forgetting what she had meant to say. Silence again followed for some time.

At last, when many thoughts had come to the darker woman's brain, and that a soothed and restful expression was visible on her face, the voice from the prostrate form asked, pathetically enough,

"Rachel, why does one feel each spring like a bird longing to migrate to other lands? Not to have the wings of a dove, to flee away and be at rest—that's you! I feel like a swallow, wanting to dart off in the air to see the sun elsewhere, to fly and flit, to have no fixed home—and to forget!"

She spoke disconnectedly, and with sudden pauses. Rachel seemed used to this, and waited, though with slow trouble just stirring her mind like a quiet ripple on the surface of depth. More was coming.

"Can't you speak? Do you never feel it?" went on the other, yet not waiting for an answer. "Are you become a stock or a stone, living in this wilderness, and yet you are younger than I am? Why, no one would think it!"

"Perhaps not," mused Rachel, her lips just curving with a smile. Nothing cynical in it, no longer dreamy; but the smile of a good woman who bids a brave farewell to the beauty she held dear with youth and other gladnesses of life, yet who is capable of a sense of humor when told she does not *feel* it—humor which some hold to have been an attribute of the divine man, and that Nature shows in some of her animal motions. It is rare in women.

Not know the nameless trouble and vague longing of spring? Why, during this past hour of quiet Rachel had felt so much a part of the surrounding universal nature that the quickening of renewed life pouring from the great heart of the earth—rising in every grass-blade, stealing in sweet sap up all the tree-trunks, and thrilling out till their utmost twigs felt the influence, causing buds to swell and softly burst from their cases into colors of rosy-white, yellow, and lilac drawn mysteriously from the brown earth—all seemed a secret into which she entered, of which she partook.

But only she herself knew how hard it was to answer.

Twice she tried to begin, for surely here was a good opportunity of uttering a wish that had been growing in her heart all spring. Twice her lips failed; but the third time, with the sudden conviction that it was *right*, Rachel said softly, putting all her powers of gentle persuasiveness, all her love and sympathy, forth in her voice and tones:

"Perhaps what we both want—indeed, I am almost sure—is some gladness; all nature is full of it, every spring. Why, there are the very trees! the wind used to sigh through their branches in winter

so mournfully, and now the young leaves are full of rustlings like laughing, and sometimes, if you listen, a rushing music of leaves when the wind sways all the trees, as if it were Ariel's spirit. And the birds, too, they consider happiness as their birthright each spring. Yes, and so it is; and ours too. They are happy in the sunshine, and their nests and young ones, as the trees and plants are in their leaves and blossoms, and all that God gives them. We may be happy too—in their way."

"Never! I happy? never again. What do you mean, Rachel? Why, you are mad!" cried her sister, starting from her recumbent posture with parted lips and a pale, strange look on her face.

"If you only would, dear, but it must be in nature's own way," Rachel forced herself to repeat, with gentle impressiveness, though her heart felt sinking. "If you and I have lost the mere joy of being young, there are other ways of being happy still left to us. We feel the want of some change, some break, some brightness in our lives. Well, then—*let us have the child here.*"

"The—child! Why? Rachel, you are evidently quite crazy. What right have you to startle me by these wild ideas, when we were living so peacefully and quietly here?" cried her sister, with weak querulousness, her lips slightly trembling, and her pretty blue eyes wandering around, as if to find some good reasons to help herself out in the resistance she offered instinctively and at once from a spirit of opposition.

"Why not, dear—at last? It is surely safe now, Magdalen. Who has disturbed us these almost five years? If there is some danger (very little here), there is a great duty. Believe me, it would just be the one ray of human sunlight in our lives to have that little child, with its cheery laugh and diamond eyes, playing about us."

"Her eyes," retorted the other, in an outburst of fury so sudden, it was like a storm out of a summer sky. "She has her father's eyes, and I hate to see them in her!"

"And I love her when she looks at me out of them," thought Rachel deep in her heart, but did not say so.

Some deprecating answers, still a few gentle remonstrances she attempted, although the blue eyes flashed at her, and the passionate voice said one or two bitter, wild words hard to be borne. Then she saw *it was of no use!* All the yearnings of her woman's instincts of motherliness, the secret hope through the long-growing spring days that thus her loneliness of heart might be filled, these must be given up. The moors and hills looked darker for it, even to her patient eyes.

But her deep tones were now heard only in tender soothing. Gradually the replies changed from passion to peevishness; then the subject was turned, and became monosyllables of raillery. After that, both voices ceased; the silence that seemed usual was resumed. Presently, as the shadows grew longer, the two women rose, and went slowly back to the little brown cottage. Neither had spoken so much together for a long time.

The hut only boasted of two earthen-floored rooms. The inner one was the bedroom, and that into which the door opened from the porch was kitchen and dwelling-room combined. In the window-

sill, cut in the whole thickness of the wall, was set a tin lantern, holding a tallow candle.

The sun had not yet sunk, however, and the candle was still unlit.

CHAPTER III.

"What time the sun reversed the mountain shadows,
And from the yoke released the wearied oxen;
As his own chariot slowly passed away,
Leaving on earth the friendly hour of rest."

LORD LYTTON'S *Horace*.

THE sun was setting that same evening, as the owner of the farm nearest to Cald-home Cottage took his way through the fields. He was going by a path that, after once crossing the high-road, led toward the glen, now a mile and a half away, and he was carrying a large covered basket.

A call in a childish treble sounded behind him, and a boy of about eight or nine came trotting along. The farmer stopped.

"Father, are you going to the cottage?"

"I am, my son."

"Take me with you," and the little fellow nestled his hand into the big, sunburned, paternal one that was unoccupied, whispering his request in a rather awed voice. The father, a broad, hearty-looking man, looked down at the sunshiny head below him.

"You bean't afraid?"

"No. What would make me?"

"Who was it would never come these last several weeks, and asked me the other night if those two were not witches, eh?"

"Well, and you said *they weren't*, and that it was wicked of any folk to say so," returned the little fellow, stoutly, as if that was reason sufficient to satisfy the world.

"Come along, Blyth," was all the farmer replied, with a smile that wrinkled up the crow's feet at the corners of his twinkling eyes, and on they went.

Farmer Berrington had a face of hearty English ruddiness, as round and inexpressive as a full moon, and a mouth as cherubic as a child's, one quite comical, in fact, between his mutton-chop whiskers. He likewise was a man of few words, but his little son found his a most conversable silence. He would walk on chewing a leaf-twig, gazing at the new-plowed fields with such intense attention that Blyth would stare too. Thereupon his parent, turning to him, might ejaculate solemnly, "Good land!" with such a full-satisfied nod and air of good-fellowship as implied that *that* was his whole mind and now Blyth knew it. On which the boy, feeling thoroughly taken into the confidence of the big man beside him, would nod too, trying to imitate the paternal air of Jove, and perhaps put likewise a leaf between his own rosy lips. But such intense gravity could only last a few minutes. Soon Blyth would be prattling again in the highest spirits, telling how he had climbed a tree that afternoon after a bird's nest, and coming down had fallen, bumping his head badly; but *that* did not matter, only the fall had broken the eggs he had carried in his mouth for safety.

At such a tale the child's upturned face would always meet the father's downward glance; and, though the farmer's lips were mute, those wise, small, half-shut eyes would be all suffused with gleaming laughter that twitched, sometimes, when more excessive, the muscles of his face. Little Blyth found his father a very merry man.

Just as both were about to cross a lane, before again taking their path through the fields, came the sound of horses approaching at a trot.

The farmer peered over the stile, whistling under his breath. Then, seeing who the new-comers were, he dropped his heavy basket and proceeded leisurely to get into the lane empty-handed.

"Father, father, you've forgotten," began little Blyth.

"Sh, my boy; I know," and a good-humored tap of two fingers on his straw hat admonished the small man that bigger men have mysterious ways of behaving which must be submitted to in them; though the nine-year-old manner of conduct seems much simpler, and more easy of understanding.

The riders approached, and proved to be another farmer riding a better-bred mare than most of his neighbors thereabouts cared to keep, with his little son on a moor-pony.

"Hey! what? Hi, Berrington! the very man for me," cried the elder rider, stopping and slapping his knee. Then, with an air of joviality plainly meant to disperse all thought of patronage on his part (which it did not, but suggested that same to the foolish resentment of his neighbors sometimes), he continued, "Well, and what takes you abroad, afoot, at this hour? Where be 'ee going to, eh?"

"'Tis a cool evening and pleasant for a walk, Mr. Hawkshaw," replied Berrington, slowly turning his eyes, with an air of satisfaction, upon the evening expanse of sky. Then, in as simple a manner as if his wits had not noticed his neighbor's inquisitiveness, he added, "Were you saying you wanted to see me?"

"Well, not exactly; I reckon I could get along without un," laughed his more vivacious acquaintance. "But still, *you* know those two women-folk, wisht* sisters, as fools of moor-people call them, who live in that crazy cottage of yours up by the Chad yonder."

"They are my tenants, as you say; therefore I ought to and do know something of them. But, with regard to the cottage, I do not know it to be crazy—p'r'aps others are worse, to my thinking."

"No offense, no offense, neighbor," cried Hawkshaw, rather quickly, after that last sentence, in contrast to the slow impressiveness of Berrington. "Only, being so old and lost in the hills, it might have moldered away long ago, I thought—ha, ha! Well, well, build a new one—go forward, that's my motto, and no good fellow ever finds Steenie Hawkshaw go back from his word. But I came round by here this evening to see these queer tenants of yours."

"In—deed?"

"I did. They served me a good turn last Saturday night, as I was coming back from market with some others. We had all

* Mysterious.

finished the evening at the Lamb and Flag, and were gay, very gay. So, when we came to the river, it was fairish dark, and, if it hadn't been for a candle they say those two always burn on purpose, I'll be d—d if this mare and I wouldn't have ridden into the Dead-man's Pool; for we were straight for it, only little Willie Tarr, the miller, gave a shout that might have raised the dead, when he found where he was. Lord! I can't help laughing; the fright nearly sobered us."

"And may one inquire what you want, then, further with the women, neighbor?" asked Berrington, still stolidly.

"Want? Why, it's they that *want*, by all accounts, man alive! I'm bound to give them something for their pains, and so I will, too. No one shall have it to say they saved Stephen Hawkshaw's life, and that he was mean about it; no, no."

For all answer, Farmer Berrington began to laugh, apparently. Not a sound came, but his huge body heaved and shook with a mountain mirth, silently further expressed by his facial contortions and the way he twisted his hands in his breeches pockets.

Hawkshaw grew half angry watching him.

"What is it, man? Speak up," he repeated several times.

"I was thinking," replied Berrington, wiping his eyes with a red and yellow cotton handkerchief, for he was afflicted with a rheum in these that laughter caused to flow, "that the sisters could hardly have known they were helping *you*; and maybe they might not have much cared. Why, man! they always put the lantern in the window, to do a kind turn to any tramp, and ask nought."

"But they'll take quick enough," returned Hawkshaw, slightly offended, searching his pockets with a great air, "and, when I told you I'd pay them, I'm not the man to break my word. But as those two stiles are still betwixt me and the cottage, and it's a goodish bit round to ride, maybe, if you are bound that way, you'd oblige me, being on foot," and he produced some loose silver.

Berrington shook his head.

"They would not have it—that's my belief. Seems strange, too; but women and weather is sometimes curious—specially unmarried ones, and living alone."

"Why, what are they, then, to refuse good money? What do they live by, and what's their name, eh?" asked the distant farmer, with a contemptuous surprise, and an insisting suspicion in his manner at such cottagers having the impudence, as it were, to refuse his offer by proxy.

"Oh, poor creatures—very," answered Berrington, nodding his head. "Live like the rest, but keep to themselves. It may be their religion; Methodys and Quakers have queer ways, I've heard tell—but don't know much about such folk. Anyway, these ones think this light of theirs an act of mercy, and therefore won't touch money for it; that I *do* know. No, not if you went to tempt them with gold."

This was said so decisively that Hawkshaw, assuming reluctance, restored his money to his pocket.

"But it's strange, too; they can't be from these parts. What is their right name, anyway?" he repeated, being well known as a busybody. Then, lowering his voice with a look toward the boys,

"Some folk say it's queer they don't work for their living, and yet they do live. And a woman down by us says her cow has never given the same amount of milk since she drove it by there a month ago—and where is that gone to? Not that I hold much by such tales; but still—why, I'd have you keep an eye on them, neighbor—I would indeed."

"And so you think witches would try to save your life and that of others, do you?" said Berrington, with weighty contempt. "Look ye here, Mr. Hawkshaw, when common people don't understand anything, *they always think the worst they can of it!* That I've remarked. But you might be above giving such superstitious, lying tales credit. Why, I've known those women nigh on four years, and if any one says they're not honest, poor souls, just tell that man or woman to say so to George Berrington." (He pronounced his name Jarge.)

"Oh, well, well!" ejaculated Hawkshaw, who loved a gossip more than most of the men in those parts, and was a foolish but good-natured soul, as indeed his once handsome face, now coarsened by drink, showed. "But, d'ye see, Parson Russell asked me last time we were out with the hounds—for he had heard them called the 'gray sisters,' after the stones in the old circle on Whiddon Moor, and felt called on to inquire—if they were sheep of his or not; 'and you always know everything, Hawkshaw,' says he. So I must tell him next time we meet. How do they live, eh? What is their right name?"

"I rayther dis—remember. Oh—Stone, I think," said Berrington, who had relapsed into more than usual impassiveness after such an unusual amount of conversation. "Why, as to work, 'tis all honest; a little sewing, and picking heather for brooms and—such-like. One is often sick for days, and the other tends her, so they're not seen much—that's all. Howsomever, they're *my tenants*, so I'll thank busy folk to mind their own business, as I never meddle with what's no concern of mine. If Parson Russell don't see them at church, why, it means they're going to heaven by some other way, and maybe a straiter gate than his own. Tell him that."

Hereupon Berrington struck his stick on the ground forcibly, and, pulling out his red handkerchief, again rubbed his forehead, heated with discussion; evidently taking umbrage at any disposition to interfere with those under his protection. "Let every man mind his own business," was the favorite sentence for which the farmer was famous; and it was a wonder that Hawkshaw had not already got more of the rough side of his tongue.

Berrington now added,

"Come on, Blyth; we must be going."

"Well, good-evening, good-evening. Come over and see me at Chadford Barton some evening, farmer. Always glad to see my neighbors," cried Hawkshaw, in a tone meant as conciliation of his offense, with a benign wave of his arm.

"Thank ye, farmer; perhaps you'll come over first to the Red House," gruffly returned George Berrington.

He stood still as one of the granite posts of the gate beside him, watching his neighbor ride off with much clatter of importance. Hawkshaw cut his mare sharply with the whip, exclaiming, "Coom

oop," and "Coom aan" to her and the boy, quite forgetting his usual gentility of speech. In truth this, when stirred to its early foundations of dialect, was vulgar enough, far more common than that of Berrington, who made no pretense at fine words, but was a man of fair education and natural good-breeding. Berrington guessed now, with a slow smile, that Hawkshaw was nettled by the word "farmer" so unhesitatingly returned to himself by the man who was proud of being thus called.

CHAPTER IV.

"Like one of Shakespeare's women."—SHELLEY.

WHEN the two riders were fairly gone, George Berrington stepped back for his big basket, then pursued his way, thinking quietly to himself. At last his gaze turned on little Blyth. The two boys, in their late meeting, had been eying each other much as might a pair of puppies of rival breeds; either mentally appraising the new acquaintance, the one with growing contempt, the other in envious defiance.

"Well, what did that boy and you say to each other, my son?" said the father.

"He asked me why I had no pony to ride, too; and I said I might have ten or twenty, if my father pleased. And so I might, mightn't I, dad?—for all yours on the moor are as good as his," answered Blyth, whose wrath had been warming in his heart. Then the child's feelings burst out unrestrained, and he half sobbed, rubbing his head against his father's coat. "But why may I not ride a pony of my own—why not, father?"

"Because you are young and tender yet, and I promised your mother, when she died, to take good care of you, boy," was the slow answer, given in a troubled tone. "Next year, lad. Learn well now, and then you shall ride to Moortown School every day."

"Steenie Hawkshaw doesn't go to school."

"No; but you are to grow up a better man than he. See here, Blyth, his father wants to seem a gentleman, and bring him up likewise." Set a beggar on horseback, thought the farmer here in due pause for comfort in speaking. "But you are to *be* one. Don't forget that. Your mother was a lady by birth—a church clergyman's daughter—though poor, and a governess. She was anxious, poor soul, for you; *she'd* have brought you up right. Well, I'm a plain man, but I'll do my best."

"Do gentry always learn much?" asked the child.

"They ought to; and I hate a man to seem what he isn't. Remember that, my boy."

"All right, I will," said Blyth, stoutly.

In silence both now went till they had approached the entrance of the glen. The sound of the Chad pouring between its scattered boulders and foaming over tiny natural wears, seen in ghostly white water through the gathering darkness, pleased the boy.

The farmer was looking before him at a huge mass of rock standing alone, a striking object, on the river bank. Just here a fringe

of alders and birches began, and, increasing in density, followed the stream up its course to the waterfall in the glen. This rock was known in the country as a Logan-stone, from its *logging* or rocking slightly on its base when pushed. At rare times, some of the young country-folk out sweethearting would stray from the beaten tracks thus far to sit down for an hour and crack nuts even under that stone monster. It was so strangely poised on three other low stones, that a child might shake it, but a giant force would be needed to dislodge it.

No travelers ever found their way hither; else any such who, clambering upon the great rock with difficulty, had discerned a shallow pan cut on its top surface, as is usual with supposed Druid altars, might have moralized over the almost ignobly innocent use to which it was now put.

Farmer Berrington placed his basket under the Logan-stone, then, bidding Blyth play by the river for a little while, withdrew himself to a short distance, and there in the open ground stood still.

It was strange in that solitary spot, with night falling, and only trees, bushes, and river, but no living creature, visible (or likely to be seen around), for a sensible English farmer to wait a quarter of an hour, doing nothing except resting first on one leg, then on the other. As the minutes passed a certain tension became apparent on the good man's face. He was thinking that supper-time at the farm was approaching; and, if not hungry himself, little Blyth might be so.

At last a dark woman's figure glided out from behind the Logan-stone. She must have come unperceived from the alders that shadowed the river-side, and through which a foot-track led toward the glen. At first she stooped to pick up the basket; but seeing Berrington's big form, motionless as a gnomon, in the middle of a circle of greensward, she hesitated. The farmer took off his hat, but still waited.

Then, after a pause of a short time, apparently necessary for her to make up her mind to something unusual, Rachel—for it was the darker of the sisters at the cottage—went straight toward Berrington with as grand a gait as if she had been Night herself. Stopping in front of him, her face quite hidden by her hood, as the man did not seem to know exactly how to begin, she calmly asked,

"You want to speak to me?"

"Well, yes. At least—hem! hem!" faltered the worthy Berrington, who secretly wished he had spent his late rest in due preparation of speech, for no right opening words would come without heed as by inspiration to him.

Another pause. Then the woman said, low but clear,

"What is it? When I saw you last, on New Year's Day, you said we might pay all due at midsummer."

"'Tis not that. No, no." Berrington shifted uneasily on his feet. "Only I'm afraid I said what I had no call to this evening. A man asked me your names, and somehow, what with hesitation like, I slipped out *Stone*."

"Ah!" A quick observer might have heard fear in that sharp inspiration rather than articulate sound; but the question which followed was quietly put. "What was the man like?"

"Oh, don't fear; only a fool of a gentleman farmer down yonder." Here the worthy owner of Red-house Farm jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "It was in gratitude for your light. But I'm thinking now, maybe, 'twas as well. For Estonia is such an outlandish name, it would only excite talk among the people here, who, though no more meddlesome than most, still cannot always be kept to their own affairs; and, indeed, I myself don't easily get my tongue round it."

A sigh, long-drawn, this time came in answer.

"I did not like living a fraud. I love the name to which we have a right."

"Well, well, believe me, ma'am, Stone would be best to answer to, if you mean to live long here."

"I trust to stay here in peace till I—till we die."

"Then take my word for it," said Berrington, impressively. "Mind you, none have asked me your name nigh these two years; none may in those, please God, to come for us all. I keep my household in good order, and my neighbors in due civility on both sides. But still, it is as well for lone women to be careful; though while George Berrington lives you can count on a friend! As you may remember, so I said, which was once and for always, on Midsummer Night these three years past come June."

"You are a good man, Mr. Berrington; and wise, which is rarer. As to Stone—well," and under that hood her face took a sad, almost cynical smile as she thought ("we are both as dead to the world as a stone; Niobe was a stone, too, though *she* was happy in her insensibility"). "Yes, it is a name that suits us. We will keep it. Good-evening."

"Good-evening, ma'am." Still the farmer hesitated. "And your sister, she keeps well, I hope?"

"She is well at present, thank you."

"Would—maybe—would not a little cheerful talk, some diversion, now, of others' company?" He stopped, as, with a kindly but emphatic shake of the head and gesture of hand, the strange woman turned away and left him alone.

"Well, well, I do not know who would be company fit for them now in my house; that's true," reflected Berrington, thinking of himself, taciturn by liking and conscious of much wanting except good-will; of little Blyth, of the two farm-maids, the shepherd and the cow-keeper. Yet adding to himself, with a proud warmth about his heart, as he went to seek his boy, who was throwing pebbles into the water, "Still, if my wife had lived—"

A few minutes later, a bright speck of light appeared in the darkness of the glen. It was as if a little shining door for fairies was opened into the heart of the black, brooding hills, where all inside might be glow and warmth.

The candle of Cold-home was lit.

CHAPTER V.

"A child with eyes divine, a little child,
A little child—no more."

L. MORRIS.

A MIDDLE-AGED woman and a little child. And this—namely all, which follows in the next few chapters—is what they seemed to remember afterward as in a dream.

The vision of an old-fashioned town; almost stagnant, but for some new industries sprung up of late years, and chiefly manifest by smoky mill chimneys and gangs of mill-hands, pale faced but loud-tongued, going by at certain hours.

On the outskirts of this town, a gloomy, prim old house built of red bricks, each of which seemed stuck by a soot layer to its neighbor. There were rusty iron gates in front, opening on a small sweep where weeds throve like the children of the wicked, and bordering laurels stretched ragged, lean, overgrown branches. Behind was a garden where little grew; fenced by a high brick wall on which no fruit now cared to ripen, over which no thief wanted to clamber.

The house had been in the country once, as a genteel abode, till the mills crept out to it. And now it stood sadly in the smokiest atmosphere of the whole town, while around stretched, instead of green fields, a wilderness of ugly coal-stores, timber-yards, and so forth.

Hardly a soul passed by there but the early troops of mill-workers, summoned at dawn, poor souls, by a dismal horn, to issue hungry and with insulting looks, if not words, at any passer by whose appearance seemed genteel, or in any way provoked remark. Back they came again at one o'clock, and once more dispersed at night. It was not a tempting neighborhood for taking walks, certainly.

Perhaps it was for this reason that neither woman nor child was scarcely ever seen out of doors. As for the latter, who was a little girl about five years old, she remembered no other home, and played daily within the small square of sooty garden between those high walls, without knowledge of any free meadows, of brighter green and sweeter flowers than the smoke-blackened ivy and hollies, and a few sad looking columbines and self-sown Canterbury-bells which smirched her pretty button of a nose when she kissed them with her rosy mouth.

The child herself was the only bright flower among them. She had lustrous dark eyes, with a roguish look lurking like a possible surprise in their depths; although otherwise she was quiet enough, and somewhat too pale of face. But her little head was covered with silky, dark curls that threw back soft reflections; her lips, where the color stays longest, were more sweetly red, surely, to her nurse's partial mind, than those of any other child. And to hear her laugh in the evenings, in screeching trills of music, shaken by sudden alarms of hide-and-seek, or jangled by tickling, when the same nurse would devotedly spend an hour in amusing her, you would

swear it could not be the same little mouse of a child who played by herself so gravely all day.

The woman was a strange enough figure. Nature had made her so big and strong, but so round-shouldered, thick-waisted, and uncouth. Her complexion was of a muddy, freckled brown; her dark hair was coarse, but wonderfully thick and long, perhaps her only claim to beauty; and her features might be easily copied by a few pinches and depressions made with finger and thumb in a lump of putty. The eyes were so small they were lost in the face. The nose had no bridge, and then sprung up as broad and thick as that of a negress. As to the mouth, it was a cavern when it opened to laugh; and, furthermore, the loss of one front tooth became then darkly visible in a gap that was quite an eyesore at first, making Hannah much uglier than she need have been, even taking into consideration a scar running up one cheek to the temple. When she took the child in her lap, little Joy would reach up her finger softly to run it along this scar, laughing and saying, "Ugly, ugly;" and Hannah, curiously moved, would always reply,

"Yes, dearie, it is sore; then kiss the place to make it well," adding, in her heart, "And it is sore when I call to mind who gave it me. Well, well, the child's lips can cure what the father's hands did. For her sake I got it, and for her sake I forgive it."

Poor ugly Hannah!

But in this little child's eyes she was beautiful.

Hannah might have been hideous. Nevertheless her breast was the most maternal to which this infantile being had ever been clasped, her arms were the strongest to toss little Joy in merry play. And what mattered a mouth's ugliness when it never opened but to say something pleasant; or little eyes that were all alive, when resting on the child, with the love that streamed from a big, warm heart?

The house was known in the neighborhood as Mr. Quigg's museum, or, to speak more familiarly, as most folk did, "Peter Quigg's" museum. "Poor Peter!" the ragged gutter-imps used to shout after him down the streets of single-brick houses, new but already crazy and shabby, in which the mill-workers slept—hardly lived, since they passed little more than the hours of night there. Peter Quigg went thither, carrying creature comforts and medicine with a furtive, ashamed air. He never looked angry with these impudent brats. Why should he? They meant no harm, and he was used to being called "Poor Peter" all his days, even by his mother who had loved him, then by his schoolmates; and absolute strangers in later life had always, after once meeting him, added that prefix of "poor" to his name.

His name—that was a sore point—*Quigg*!

"What beautiful woman would ever have consented to take such a name?" he would sometimes despondently ask himself on chill twilights, when the loneliness of his old house made itself more heavily felt than usual. Now Johnson, his mother's name, *she* might not have disliked that. But to change his patronymic, announce the fact in newspapers, bear the laughter and ridicule of his native town! He shivered at the thought, and had not courage. Perhaps his gaze

on this same evening would wander round the old furniture of his dingy room.

"And poor, too," he would add to himself. "At least, not with means to give such a jewel a proper setting."

Then rising in the right but feeble hope of putting an end to such vainly sorrowful reflections, an old mirror, topped by a decrepit eagle of faded gilding, reflected his person. He stopped short.

"Ah, and that worst of all!" *That* meant that he was only a small, pale man, hollow-chested and nerveless, without good looks, without health. "It is no wonder she would not," he said to himself, "but still—"

All this explains why Peter Quigg had never married. Also he lived in nervous dread that little Joy, whom he had received into his house out of pure goodness of heart, might be supposed to be related to him. This he had delicately explained to Hannah when child and nurse arrived at the museum four years or more ago. She agreed to his views of discreet guarding against gossip, with wonderful zeal. Also she insisted on undertaking the whole duties of general servant in the old house thenceforth; baking, cooking, scrubbing late and early, washing (what her master never took account of) a marvelous number of little white clothes to keep her nursling "like a princess," she would say to herself, refusing peremptorily every offer of a charwoman often offered by Peter's troublesome conscience.

"What's not known can't be *much* spoken of; and, as the proverb says, a lie has no legs, but scandal has wings," Hannah would reply, with a guttural laugh. She wanted no one spying and poking inside the house—not she. For which Hannah had perhaps her reasons, into which the timid little man who had given her the protection of his roof did not like to inquire closely, whatever he vaguely might guess. So the house being roomy enough, and Hannah resolved that no dust should cry shame on her resolution, it was well she was so strong, and no wonder she had not much time to play with baby Joy.

As to the house being called a museum, here is the explanation.

Peter Quigg's father, a doctor, had been a great collector of curiosities of an unusual kind. Among other things, being given to ethnology, he had a room full of fine skulls and some skeletons; another still, lined with cases of what Hannah, being a northern woman, called "wee beasties in spirits, which was far too good a death for them!"

The son had grown up entirely given to the same taste, having one only early ambition, shadowed by timidity, to be curator to a large museum. The chance never came. Meanwhile the paternal house, and enough means for his modest wants, did become his property. He traveled yearly, adding to his collections with patience and self-denial of other luxuries: sometimes he sold duplicates to other curio-hunters with careful honesty, thereby adding a little to his income. That was all.

No, not quite all. Once, in his travels, he had made the acquaintance of a being who was thenceforth his ideal—a woman! This was his one romance. Peter was not insensible to the charm of the young life so sweetly unfolding itself between the dark walls of the

museum; the little feet that made music on the stairs. He was drawn to the child, but, when it came shyly to his knee, he did not know what on earth to say to it! He loved infants in the abstract, but stood in terrible awe of them in flesh and blood. They exacted such a *drain of the animal spirits!* and he had little or none to meet the demand.

Still he brought the child home dolls at times—foolish playthings, truly, but then his heart was not mangled by seeing them destroyed; while the picture-books he brought far more often (long before she could read) were torn by those terrible dimpled fists with glee, and flaunted before his sorrowing eyes. Plainly, in never knowing paternity, Peter Quigg had escaped much sorrow.

Still, many a time, looking at him as he sat alone among his cases and books, Hannah would think to herself pitifully, as she delighted her energies in strong work, “He has a good heart, poor soul! It’s just like a well-laid grate; all the sticks and coal there, and nothing wanting but a spunk o’ fire. And that he’ll never get.”

So the weeks and months, and now years, wore on. Hannah scrubbed, her master dreamed; and few, very few, beyond Hiram, the trusty custodian of the museum treasures in his master’s absence, who had grown into serving-man from serving-boy there, knew, of the existence of sunny little Joy, or had even many times seen Hannah’s face.

CHAPTER VI.

“Waly, waly! bairns are bonny;
Ane’s eneugh and twa’s ower mony.”

Old Proverb.

THE fourth spring came that child and nurse lived at the museum. Spring, a season when most tender young things, or frail persons, show signs of weakness as the weather warms. Hannah noticed with growing fear that her nursling lost heart daily to laugh at play, would mope on her little stool, and looked thin and white.

“Small wonder,” said the nurse aloud to herself. “Never to see a bit of blue in God’s sky, but only them nasty reek fogs, and breathe only smoke, smoke! And a garden like a prison-yard, with black, bare earth and gritty cinder-walks. Poor little heart!”

So she went straight to her master, and said all her mind, thus ending,

“The child will die, sir. I must take her away for a change, and I only pray in merciful goodness she may pick up her flesh again.”

Hannah had a vigorous way of expressing herself that was in strong contrast to poor Peter Quigg’s limp gentleness. He passed his thin fingers through the lank brown hair that fell straight on either side of his forehead.

“Whatever you think best, nurse. Dear me, what a frightful responsibility children are! But, you know, I never wished to keep you both here against your will.”

“That’s true, sir,” and Hannah thought, with some grim humor in her heart, “’Deed it’s more likely you took us in against *your* will!” adding aloud, “Then we may go as soon as I can get things fixed to rights?”

"Stay, stay. You won't think of doing anything without writing to *her*!" exclaimed Mr. Quigg, with a sudden thought that lent almost firmness to his tone. And he thought to himself, "Then I shall see her letter."

"She has nothing to say to the child. It's not hers; and, anyway, they trust everything to me," majestically replied Hannah, with crushing decision. "Oh! I'll write. I'll go first and write after. There's not too much time to lose, maybe; for besides—"

She stopped herself sharply. What was the use of alarming the kindly being before her, who now waved his hand in yielding assent, and for whom she felt quite a protecting fondness, believing him the most chicken-hearted, gentle creature ever made in the likeness of man? And then—she might be wrong.

The truth was that, besides the child's pining looks, something else had occurred to give Hannah troubled thought, if not actual distress of mind, during the last fortnight.

"Misfortunes never come single—that's a true word," she sighed, forebodingly, to herself. For with the last April days, it being the time when gypsies take the road, and tramps and hawkers of all kinds are stirred to try new ways, leaving the winter beats in the town, an organ-grinder had passed three times by their gate.

Now this was an unusual thing in itself, because piles of timber and coal heaps are not a rich neighborhood for itinerant musicians. The first time, therefore, that little Joy's ears were ravished by the sweet sounds, she trotted into the front parlor, which was forbidden ground, sacred to company that never came, with its furniture shrouded in holland sarks, like ghosts waiting resurrection, and there climbing on the window-sill, she glued her pretty face to the panes—whence Hannah had not the heart to dislodge her.

As to the man, he was an ill-looking fellow enough, small and sallow, with a bush of unkempt hair. But there! what harm could a stranger do for once, and outside the iron gates too?

"I'd rather not meet him on a dark night alone," thought Hannah to herself; and there seemed an end to it.

The next Sunday night (and a dark night, too), as Hannah had nearly reached home after chapel, this very Italian came close up to her under a lamp and tried to catch a glimpse of her features under the thick veil she wore hanging loose and straight from her roundabout straw bonnet. Somehow his act gave the woman a cold shiver down the back as she hurried in to the shelter of her kitchen. "What with my figure and clothes, he couldn't have took me to be pretty; and what was he doing down *this* road, without ever any people to rob nor publics to drink at?"

The next Sunday Hannah did not go to chapel; though this service was the only outing the good soul permitted herself; while also she had hitherto thought herself safe from notice of her surpassing ugliness behind her veil.

Twice the organ-grinder came again, and played outside the gates for nearly half an hour. But he saw no child's face. Hannah had grimly said to herself, "I thought as much;" and yet why? She could not have told. But she had invented a strange new game for her nursling called "Lie still." On the appearance of any passerby, notably of the organ-grinder, little Joy flew to hide behind the

nearest curtain; and there, only one bright eye occasionally peering out, would remain like a mouse till the bad man, who might steal little girls, was gone. Then, on Hannah's signal, forth she would come, and they had high romps together over the enemy's discomfiture. This was all treated as a joke, however, and Joy thought her nurse a person of vast invention.

"Where to go, Hiram; ay, that's the rub," repeated Hannah the same night on which she had spoken to Mr. Quigg, having returned to the kitchen. "Him upstairs," and she jerked her head toward the ceiling significantly, "will be off, too, for a fortnight, he says, so you can keep house till we come back."

"Sure-ly, sure-ly," said Hiram, with a joyful sound piercing through the decent regret he strove to infuse into his thick tones. Visions rose before him of a cozy bar-parlor, and of a welcoming widow with whom he had been keeping mild company these twenty years back. Hannah looked at him sharply, but thought in exoneration, "Well, well, it *is* dull here; and he's a man. Why, I'd as lief be in jail myself, barring the confinement. Hiram's a decent body, but a gawk."

"Fresh air, and a pure breeze to blow some red into that babe's blessed face is the necessary," she mused aloud. "I'd take her up to Ayrshire, but that all my own folk there are dead or scattered. If my sister was alive—"

"I've a sister," announced Hiram, his thick wits stirring at the prospect of perfect freedom for a while. "She might give you lodging. She lives close to the sea at Sandybeach" (the nearest small sea-port), "some five hours distant by coach." Then he stopped. "But I forgot, you mightn't care to go to the like of her, if you knew; and yet, she is an honest woman now this many a year."

"Why, Hiram, what is it?"

"She got into trouble in her youth, you see," said Hiram, apologetically. "It was all along of vanity; but she borrowed her mistress's clothes to wear, and then was caught and tried for stealing. Prison ain't a good school for a young girl, and maybe, after she came out, she was little the better in her conduct for it. I don't know—I don't want to know—but she was nearly heart-broke, and no one would employ her. She wouldn't come near us for years. At last she writes and says she is married to an old sailor on a pension—very comfortable. I went to see her after that. She has a nice cottage and children now—all clean and tidy. No one knows down there; but I think it only honest to tell you."

"I don't know but what she would do; them that has known trouble is sometimes easier to live with," said Hannah, half to herself. Then they discussed the matter further. Lastly the woman said, artlessly, to the man, "Have you noticed that organ-grinder who comes past here of late? Is he respectable?"

"He! Lord ha' mercy! he's the greatest thief and rascal in the town; been had up times without end," answered Hiram, simply. "Josey is the name he goes by. I sent him off to-day, not liking that sort of loafing about our house." (Here Hiram plumed himself, having a great idea of the value of the museum's contents). "'You've a sweet leetle mees there; she loves to hear me,' says he."

‘Yes, and she’s got a bitter big nurse that will send you off with a flea in your ear,’ says I—‘ha, ha!’ and away he went, taking a squint back at the house.”

“Hiram,” impressively uttered Hannah, “your tongue is better oiled nor your wits, and it’s a pity they both don’t keep pace together; for, as it is, you’re a fool.”

CHAPTER VII.

“And round the pebbly beaches far and wide
I heard the first wave of the rising tide
Rush onward with uninterrupted sweep;
A voice out of the silence of the deep.”

LONGFELLOW.

BRISK, short waves were breaking on a sandy shore. A salt breeze was blowing the sunny sky free of clouds, and making the blood tingle cheerily in the veins of those who inhaled its strong, life-giving breath.

Some fisher-children were at play in a little cottage-garden fronting the beach, and among these was baby Joy, her head bare and her small person covered by a coarse blouse, so that she was fit to enjoy the new-learned delight of mud-pies and sand-castles, which these wonderful children taught her, to her heart’s content.

The small creature was at first utterly amazed with delight at meeting children, real children, for the first time in her life. She had only seen them at rare moments before from her prison windows. And then the sea, the great shining sea, sometimes laughing at her, sometimes scolding, and the waves that chased her when she ventured down to them bare-legged, holding the fisher-boys’ hands timidly, till she fled back shrieking with frightened glee as the foam washed round her rosy, bare feet. Then again the hard, white strand, with its strange sea-creatures, its shining pebbles; and the wonders, too, of this tiny garden where she and her companions at present were busily building a noble shell-house supplied amply from the shingle, with an elegant path to this mansion marked by bits of broken glass.

The rush of new sights, sounds, and ideas almost overfilled the small soul; her little heart and brain seemed bursting with such new-found gladness and wonder.

Standing on a slab of natural rock which she called her throne, that formed a rude seat among the flowers of the cottage plot, little Joy sent out a strange, wild cry. It was a jubilee inspired by nature’s self.

Inside the cottage kitchen, two women, who were seated by the fireside at their evening tea, looked at each other and smiled.

“It does my heart good to hear her. Just hark! The way that child has brightened up in these ten days, no one could have believed that hadn’t seen it. Yes; bless you, my pretty dear,” said Hannah, applying herself to biting a large piece of smoking-hot, buttered scone; her face shining with satisfaction both over her charge and the meal.

“It has done yourself good, too,” said Hiram’s sister, kindly,

who was a Mrs. Harper, the hostess. "To be shut up alone for years in that old coal-hole of a house, with not even a soul to speak to—for Hiram's wits would lie in a salt-spoon—I wonder you didn't die of it."

"Well, it *was* lonely never to have a woman to say a word with, that I will own," averred Hannah, with a sigh like a small breeze; the pleasure of enjoying what all women call "a good talk" with one of her own sex causing her to open her heart more freely than a fortnight ago she would have believed credible. Then, her soul being stirred, she thus began, "One never got even as much as a breath of fresh air; while as to black beetles and rats in the kitchen, they'd have been tumbling over each other if I hadn't taught them to make room civilly by help of poison. But the want of company was worst, for I always was a great one for being sociable. Some finds a pleasure in being stuck-up and keeping themselves *to* themselves, as they call it. Now, in my mind, that's often enough because no one but themselves will put up with them. The Lord made me ugly, so, thinks I, that's a hint it's my duty to make myself more pleasant; but whenever Providence lays a duty on folks, Mrs. Harper, the devil's sure to come and try them sorely. And so how could I pass a joke, or be as agreeable as a Christian woman would wish among murdering foreigners and black Injins, with whom my lot was cast for years? Ah! well, even the old museum is better nor that; but this is the first time, I may say, I've felt happy and comfortable for years. And you're the first woman as I've met, this many a day, I could put trust *or* confidence in."

After what Hiram said, this may seem remarkable. But, in truth, his sister was a little woman who could be very pleasant to people she liked, and as sharp-tongued and distant to others. She had been pretty once, and had quick eyes with a furtive glance in them. Her manner to strangers at first was glib, with a forced gayety, but with husband and children it was tender and thoughtful; and so it was now to Hannah. Such a tea as she knew how to set on that well-scoured, round table, too; such a pile of smoking cakes crowned with butter. 'True, she drank out of her saucer; a familiarity of ease Hannah had rigidly forbidden herself, for the child's sake, hitherto—but one must do at Rome as the Romans. So, with quite a joyous remembrance of early years, the nurse likewise balanced her saucer on her open hand; and drank noisily, and was happy, as she said, and very comfortable.

"Have another cup, and finish that plateful of cake; do. There's as much more hot in the oven," said Mrs. Harper. "It's a wonder to me, Mrs. Hannah, if I may take the liberty to say so, that you did stay so long in foreign parts, seeing you disliked them that much. Not that I mean to ask questions; it's not what I care for much myself," and she gave a little sigh.

"I know, I know. Best friends don't go raking in our ash-pits to spy at what's thrown out," returned Hannah impressively. "But, my dear, 'twas not along o' myself I did it, but because of one I loved better nor self, and would ha' died for, since ever she first came to my arms, not much bigger than little Joy there; and I a lump of a girl and a nursery-maid. I'd had a rough life at home, and most that I gave my love to only paid me back with laughter

for my ugliness. But with these 'twas all soft words and pretty ways that eased my sore heart. And she, bless her! was the prettiest thing I'd ever seen, and was fond of me, for all my ugly looks. So I just gave myself up to serve her and hers, for better or worse, through life, please God. And just *as* much as I loved her, I hated another person. That was a man!—her husband, when my dear had grown up. Sometimes, men seem to think all women to be either fools or angels, or both together, liked mixed stuff that's woven. But I *know* most men are whole fools or just devils, and he was a devil."

"No, there's good men, too," said Harper's wife, quickly, with a flush on her cheek. "I grant you they're rare, but—well, Hiram has told you about me. Then I met my old man, and *he believed in me*, in spite of knowing everything. When men thinks us good, it goes half-way to making us good."

"One went half-way toward making me wicked. He gave me *that*," returned Hannah, raising her hand to the great scar on her face, and flushing, too, but from a different emotion, while a little shiver of hatred and fear passed over her body, coarse and unemotional though she seemed. "Yes, as if I weren't ugly enough. He'd have killed me if he could, for I used to fight him for my young mistress's sake, tooth and nail, as you may say. She had been a spoiled darling, and he had the pride of Lucifer, so it was like thunder raging against lightning; or, as my old mother used to say, 'When the man's fire and the wife's tow, in comes the de'il, and blows it in a low.'"

"A little drop more tea?" consolingly urged Mrs. Harper. "Oh! dear me, what a world of trouble and sorrow it is! And, even when things do better a bit, like with me, one can never be sure of keeping them. They are the best husbands that gets drowned always, or else, like mine, they're not in the best of health. Well, well, there's rest at the end, we'll hope."

"And I'll live to plague him yet; if it was only for her child's sake," ended Hannah, with a half-sob of which she seemed ashamed, drying her eyes quickly afterward with her knuckle, and ending in a hoarse, short laugh.

Mrs. Harper had likewise dropped a tear more softly into her tea, whereupon she used her apron. Both felt in rare sympathy. The world had been so cruel to each of them.

"And so the child doesn't belong to Mr. Quigg?" said the little woman, with a little laugh. "It was a wonder to me at first, how he ever came to have such a sweet infant among all his old bones and stones, an' nasty, grinning idols. It wasn't likely, somehow. She reminds me of my own little girl that died, and I've nought but boys left. Well, I don't understand it yet, nor ask to; but, if her mother was like your own child, it follows this one ought to be as dear to you, as she *is*—which any one can see."

"Like my grandchild, and old fools is the worst fools," laughed Hannah, with a grim humor against herself; then, in sudden change to almost solemnity, the subject being sacred, "That babe just lives in the very core of my heart, like a pippin in an apple. What does St. Paul say? 'Like as a nurse cherisheth her children.' Well, *he* knew what he was talking about, I know—just by that."

There was a moment's pause. Mrs. Harper was not strong in Scriptural quotations. Then as usual she had recourse to the resources of the tea-pot.

"Here are the hot cakes too, just beautiful," she added, bustling back from the oven with a delicious dish, at sight of which Hannah's eyes greedily glistened. But, just after the latter had taken a large bite out of her fresh scone, she happened to glance toward the cottage window. She sprang up; her brown face turned of a tallow color; and she held by the back of the chair, her knees quaking.

"Oh, Lord, ha' mercy! It's—it's *him*!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"O, littel child, alas! what is thy gilt,
That never wroughtest sin as yet, pardè
Why wilt thyn harde farder han thee spilt?"

CHAUCER.

HANNAH stifled a cry, and pointed outside with a shaking forefinger.

"Who?" cried Mrs. Harper, jumping up to her help. Looking out too, she saw a man leaning over the low wall and talking to little Joy. At this distance he looked a handsome, dissolute scoundrel, fit for a billiard-marker or the betting-ring; for he wore his gray felt hat with a far too arrogant air, considering his coat was out at elbows. But on nearer view he had finer points, his head being nobly shaped, and if too heavy about the lower jaw, yet with a broad, low forehead and deep-set, gleaming eyes. His figure too, though disguised under his shabby clothes, was none the less of splendid build, broad-shouldered and tall, yet spare and supple; a body of iron and muscles of steel. He was more a Fra Diavolo, deserted of followers and reduced to misery, than a mere vulgar villain.

"It is! and he's after the child. Oh, let me out to him? What's this? Help me."

In reality, Hannah was almost fainting, but did not know the feeling.

"Sit down; you'll drop. Let me go; I'll save her," uttered Mrs. Harper in rapid tones.

"See! he doesn't even know her for certain in my Jim's old pinafore. He's speaking too easy and looks puzzled, that I can tell from here. When did he see her last?"

"Not since she was in arms."

"Pshaw! But what right has he to her? Say quick!"

"He's her father!" gasped Hannah. "He nearly killed, and then deserted the mother before the child was born. And now she's hiding from him; and he's after little Joy out of deviltry, maybe just to vex her, or to get hold of the poor babe's little money, all that's left from the big fortune he spent. He might kill my lamb—who knows?"

"He sha'n't get her, the villain! Stay quiet; don't show yourself, he'd know you. I'll be even with him."

And understanding the situation, with a rapidity taught by terri-

ble experience in the evil ways and slippery places of life, her heart hot with the maternal instinct of defending the young, Mrs. Harper opened the door softly with assumed carelessness. Both women now could hear, as well as see, a strange scene.

"What is your name, little girl?" urged the man, in a sonorous, foreign voice to which he lent a most persuasively musical intonation.

"What is yours? What is yours?" answered Joy from her perch on the rock, looking up from under her brows with an innocence of fun, like impudence.

"But where do you live? Tell me."

"At home, of course."

And the child laughed contemptuously—laughed in his face.

"And where is home? What do you call home? Is it *that* house?"

"Can you dance?" asked the sprite, dancing up and down on her stone and waving first one brown dimpled arm, then the other, invitingly toward him, in baby imitation of a little girl in spangles she had seen performing on a booth to her delight. She was tired of questions. Just as she ducked in a final courtesy, Joy was snapped up from behind.

"Well, I never! just in time to catch you from toppling backward, and you might have broken your neck. Oh, what children is!" cried Mrs. Harper, in such a scolding voice as only mothers have the right to use, while holding the child tenderly on her arm.

"Is that your little girl, madam?" asked the man by the wall, lifting his hat.

Mrs. Harper turned her eyes on him, as if his presence had not been worth noticing till he spoke.

"Well! you don't suppose she belongs to the parish, do you? Or am I too old or too ugly to have such a one?" She stood her ground boldly, like a woman whose cottage is her castle, and who is apt to take offense at any one likely to infringe her rights or privacy by looking over her garden wall, though it *be* only two and a half feet high. At the same time she tenderly pressed Joy's head against her neck, who had begun to whimper. And as Mrs. Harper herself had black hair, though sleek, and a face once pretty, the man outside thought her maternity of the child possible enough—and was puzzled.

"I was told that the good people of these houses do sometimes take in lodgers. Do you do so too, perhaps, my good lady?"

"Lodgers? not I. You needn't apply here for accommodation for man or beast." Mrs. Harper qualified this bold assertion in her own mind, by the fact that Hannah and the child were Hiram's and her own friends; and that it was a white lie, if any.

"There are a woman and a child—a little girl—lodging somewhere near here. They are of my acquaintance, and I am searching for them. Can you perhaps help me?"

"A woman and a child—well, you see—there are so many come and go."

"She is big, *immense!* and *ugly!*" the man made a significant gesture of disgust, checking himself as Mrs. Harper glibly interposed.

"Ugly is she, your friend! well, I don't know. There's two not unlike that description staying in the house of a sailor; there, that white one, d'ye see? Hush, my little bird, no, you must come indoors now; your Minnie wants you. But they went out early this morning in his boat, I believe across the bay, and may not be back till nightfall. That's them, most likely. But you'll excuse me, my old man won't like my staying out talking to a stranger." She glanced apprehensively back at the cottage-door, and with a sharp little nod retreated, calling, "Jim! Willy! here, leave that play at once; I want you."

And, to the boys' surprise, their mother sent them off on long errands with the loud voice and dispatch of a termagant.

"There! he's off down the road; and they're gone in the opposite direction, so can answer no questions," she announced triumphantly, but under her breath, once more entering the cottage. Hannah was hidden by the door as if ready for a spring. At several moments during the late interview, short as it had been, it was all she could do to prevent herself rushing out.

"Come into the back room; no one can see in there," went on Mrs. Harper, locking the cottage door as she spoke. "My dear, you heard—it's true enough; he's after you. But I've set him to watch Joe Beasley's house; who has taken his own sister and her girl back to their home, and may stay all night with them himself."

"Still she's not safe here, my own lamb, my curly-locks," cried Hannah, who had snatched up the child, and was covering her with kisses, against which her darling saucily rebelled. "Oh! you did wonders, and may the Lord reward you an' bless you! But we must fly—we must hide."

Her stalwart form was strangely agitated, and then Mrs. Harper perceived that she grasped still unawares a terrible weapon, an iron bar, used to secure the door at night, which in Hannah's brawny arms would have been a terrible weapon descending on an enemy. She looked truly dangerous, with her eyes glowing; for all her strength of body and immovability of purpose, as of a rock, had returned to her.

"I was took aback, I own; and foolish; and my head is never quick at thinking. But now I know what to expect at least—and there's no time to lose," Hannah ejaculated.

There was no time to lose, indeed. The two women consulted together in haste, and then, thanks to Mrs. Harper's quickness of invention, a plan was fixed on.

"If you *could* have stayed, my old man would keep his own house and those in it against five such men as that," Mrs. Harper suggested, with pardonable bombast, and a regretful look at the child, who was contentedly seated on the floor hugging a kitten almost to suffocation, with little chirrups of laughter. "It seems such a pity!"

"Must is my master," returned Hannah, shortly. "Once inside Mr. Quigg's house, we're safer; for, if he out there tries police, who would take the child from safe hands and give it to such a ruffian? Don't tell me!—*respectability*, that's what helps folks more nor anything else! Prove your case, says we, or Peter Quigg, when I put

him up to it. And who would believe a Spaniard like that, in our Christian country?"

Even while delivering what she no doubt thought these upright and commendable remarks, Hannah had been undressing herself. In a few minutes she was once more clothed; but this time needing the aid of Mrs. Harper's fingers and conjugal experience.

"Tuck in that comforter tight and tidy; that's sailor fashion. And don't fear pulling down your sou'-wester over your face, dear; my man wears it so. Now—"

There was a complete metamorphosis! Hannah wore a sailor's rough pea-coat and canvas trousers, a big comforter pulled up round the lower part of her face, and a flapping sou'-wester almost concealing her features. She was so nearly unrecognizable that even Joy, who now stared wide-eyed, with one finger in her mouth, would hardly go near her.

"Is she frightened, and no wonder, at her old nurse making such a guy of herself? But it's only a game, my precious; we're going to play 'Lie Still.'"

Mrs. Harper was meanwhile flinging Hannah's own clothes into a big washing-basket, covering them with half of a clean sheet.

"There's a nice little nest for her. I'll put you in, missy, and we'll cover you and take you for a ride."

Fortified by Hannah's assurances of the delights of this game, with promises exacted and given to lie as still!—as still!—and never wriggle or stir, for an organ-grinder was on the road, the child allowed herself to be snugly bestowed and covered up.

"Mercy on us! he *is* out there, walking up and down—and looking doubtful. He's keeping guard betwixt Joe Beasley's and this," murmured Hannah. "Could he know me?"

"No living soul would; still, if you're feared—"

"No, no. It's best—here goes, life or death! For, if he wants the child, he'll have to do for me," said Hannah, bravely.

"Wait; can you smoke a pipe? Just take a draw or two at least, as you pass by, and he couldn't tell you then."

Mrs. Harper was right. Two minutes later they went down the road, carrying the washing-basket between them, and passing the stranger under his very nose. He only saw the little woman of the cottage talking sharply to her burly sailor husband.

"Hurry, John, do. You are so slow, and you know they're always angry if the washing's late."

The round-shouldered seaman with the rolling gait only answered in a monosyllable, and smoked placidly, as the Spaniard's gaze rested on him an instant. Placidly! and how her heart quaked! Once round a corner out of his sight, both hurried along by the shore, avoiding curious neighbors. There were some bathing-boxes at a little distance, still laid up for winter, but of which Harper had the care. His wife pulled out the key of one of these, and her false spouse and the basket disappeared inside. In a wonderfully short time, while Mrs. Harper kept anxious watch, Hannah, in her own attire, came out again, leading Joy, vastly pleased at her release, but prattling of the funny game.

Then both women looked fearfully round, and running whenever

not likely to be noticed, they gained the market-place of the little town.

A coach ran daily between Sandybeach and the smoky, bigger town inland they were bound for as a goal of safety. It was just starting on its return journey.

"Any seats, ladies, do you say?" cried the guard. "Just one left inside, and—yes, the little girl can sit on your knee. Hurry up, hurry up—we're late."

Next minute, Hannah and the child were inside. The horn sounded. Putting her head out as they started, to nod farewell to Mrs. Harper, with relief at last and joyful elation, Hannah recognized a pair of black, beady eyes, and quickly drew herself in again, feeling as if she had just seen a venomous insect.

There was dirty Josey, the organ-grinder, standing among the little crowd that always gathered to see the coach start.

And he had seen her, too—and he smiled.

CHAPTER IX.

"Loud-voiced night, with the wild wind blowing
 Many a tune;
 Stormy night, with white rain-clouds going
 Over the moon;
 Mystic night, that each minute changes—
 Now as blue as the mountain-ranges
 Far, far away;
 Now as black as a heart where strange is
 Joy, night or day."

IN spite of the second shock on seeing Josey, Hannah soon began to recover her spirits in the coach.

After all, when four fine horses were whirling one out of the little town, and past milestones at a spanking pace, needs must she should feel exhilarated. She had escaped with such superior cunning, too! Her large brown face wreathed into a grotesque smile of humor, as she chuckled over the remembrance of what a queer figure she had cut in man's clothes.

And now they were off and away, and who could overtake them?

So Hannah laughed in her heart, and sung a pæan of exultant victory over the enemy, though in silence. Yet, as little things will strangely mix with great in our queer brains, even in supreme moments, a shade did occasionally fall over the brightness of her exalted mood. She regretted that second plate of buttered Scotch cakes. They would all have been cold and sodden, too, by the time that Mrs. Harper returned. What a pity *he* had not appeared five minutes later!

Ah! Hannah, Hannah, greedy woman, as if there were no greater troubles to think about. Are there no dangers yet to be carefully considered—avoided, if possible; lastly, at worst, fought against, even to death?

With a slowly awakening sense of dull horror at her own levity in thus amusing herself, as if a hunted hare, having doubled and gained respite, should play, while yet knowing the hounds are in full cry on her track, Hannah shook herself together, and thought—*what next?*

To her vast surprise, nearly an hour had gone by. Baby Joy, who had shared her nurse's jubilee at first, in delight herself at their rapid journey, was now leaning a heavy, sleepy head on Hannah's breast. The light was fading. Cold was creeping over their half of the round, darkening world as it rolled nightward. The stars began to pierce the far, twilight distance overhead with silverspecks; each point like a thought of another word; of, maybe, another life there; of eternity.

Hannah did not think out such thoughts perhaps, but yet inchoate germs of them troubled her brain. She shivered; and the influences of darkness and the night began to steal over her. The body is tired then, and its powers cannot shield the spirit when the latter is stirring and restless.

She *must* think what she should try next; but she never had been good at thinking. Even in old days, her dear mistress had been head, she the willing hands.

With that, she withdrew the shawl a moment under which the child slept on her knee. Its cheeks were red as a poppy with heat. Long, curling lashes fringed the closed eyes that were such wells of liquid dark light. What a pretty, soft creature it was; so helpless, so innocent. All the womanly fibers of the nurse's heart stirred as she gazed at it; the maternal instinct that is so beautifully strong in the very animals to defend their tender young, even to death, rose more powerfully within her than ever in her life before, dearly as she had loved her charge.

The more dangers she ran for its sake, the more passionately she was resolved to risk all.

"Sleep soft, my pet. Your mother shall never need to ask poor Hannah why she didn't take good care of her child," she silently murmured, feeling quite weak with the flood of tenderness, of old recollections, and present gratitude to God for their escape, that overcame her.

A burly, dissatisfied-looking man on the opposite side just then pulled out his watch and grumbled.

"Call that good going! Humph! If I had taken the new railway that runs within two miles of Sandybeach, I'd have been in the town by now, and in my own house," and he looked round and nodded, as if all the passengers ought to take an equal interest in his loss of time.

Hannah turned cold. A new apprehension seized her.

"Did you—did you say, sir, that the new steam-coach," she stammered, forgetting the right term to use, "*that it gets in before us, please?*"

"I did, ma'am; I said the railway. Half an hour before us." And the big man tapped his stick ponderously on the floor, as if that settled the question.

Hannah felt as if the ground was cut from under her feet; she that had believed themselves so cleverly escaped for this night.

Why, they two would be waiting for her at the other end!

Some minutes passed in silent consternation. Then she thought to herself.

"I'll get out when we get into the town, and make my way through the back streets. They'll be waiting for me at the 'Dragon.'"

As the coach entered the sleeping town, she had it stopped, therefore, and slipped down trembling, half expecting to feel her arm clutched in the darkness. It was raining, and the streets were sloppy and slippery as Hannah hurried along through the night. The lamps were few, and she avoided their light, for fear of betrayal, as much as possible; but the darkness was even more grewsome and terrible. At every corner, at every blacker shadow from a boarding, by the pit-mouths of deep doorways, her knees knocked together and her heart beat rapidly. For now *here*, and the next instant, though she had momentarily escaped, *there*, might be hidden the lurking forms ready to spring out upon her. And the child was so heavy; with it in her arms she was helpless to defend themselves both. Women often suffer worse agonies from their imaginations than in real dangers.

So, like a shadow through the shadows, a black figure in the blackness, wet, weary, with strained arms and frightened heart, poor Hannah hurried and stumbled on. She never thought of turning aside to some inn or lodging for shelter. As a hunted animal to its lair, so she ran on, not able to think, but with a dim belief that at home she must be safe. There were bolts and bars at the "museum," and Hiram's strong arm; and behind Peter Quigg's feeble person the vague, immense mightiness of the law, as Hannah's mind regarded it with awe. She was only a slow-witted creature, but a faithful servant—that was all.

"The law would never take an innocent child from under a good man's roof, where it will get a decent Christian upbringing, to give it to that black-hearted, foreign scoundrel—no, not if he was a thousand times its father! Or else the law is neither common-sense nor justice in England," she thought, with a profound belief and triumph in the righteousness and excellence of our island's institutions and inhabitants, as compared with all the rest of the foreign world. Poor Hannah! one might hope that her beautiful faith in the law's protection might never be shaken!

And now she was among the silent timber-yards. A few more minutes and the dark old brick house, with its inclosing walls, loomed through the gloom. How she blessed its sight!

She hurried up to the door, which was evidently locked and barred for the night, as no light was visible in the hall nor in Mr. Quigg's study.

"The master has not come home," she pronounced to herself, with a sigh. "He would be sitting up till far later nor this, if he was."

She rang timidly several times, then loudly, growing bolder with a sense of increasing danger.

Still in vain.

Becoming terrified, she ran round to that side of the house where Hiram slept, and flung gravel against the panes of his window. Never a sound! True, he slept as heavily as a log, but still that pebble shower of her last handful was violent enough to rouse the Seven Sleepers.

Ah! She struck her forehead with her palm. What an idiot she was! Of course, Hiram was at his public-house; the master was

away, so he was having a spree, and might not be back for hours yet—and he had taken the key!

The child, which she had put down on the ground during her efforts, clung to her skirts cold and frightened, begging to go indoors.

“Me want in! me want in!”

The cry cut Hannah to the heart.

“Hiram’s locked the door, my pretty. Hush, hush, don’t cry. (Oh, God, help us!” This she murmured in her heart.)

“Put-ty me through the window!” exclaimed little Joy, in childish jubilee, trotting toward the back of the house. It was an old game to let her creep through the kitchen window bars, when tired of play in the garden, and she was delighted at the revived recollection. To Hannah it was like an inspiration from on high sent through the child’s lips.

The kitchen window was shuttered and barred, of course; besides, it looked into the garden, the door of which was locked. But here, at the side of the house, a small, square window stared them in the face. It was near the ground, but not barred, being a mere loophole made to light the entry to a side-door. Hannah snatched up a stone. With a few blows of her vigorous fist she dashed in the glass, which was soldered into the wall, then cleared the opening of jagged bits carefully, feeling it with her hands.

“Now, there is a nice little door to get in by,” she whispered, and then with exultation put the child through—oh, so tenderly!

Joy dropped inside with a cry more startled than frightened, changing to a laugh of satisfaction on finding herself safe on her feet. Was there ever a braver little maid? thought her old nurse. She was inside, safe now within four strong walls, if even Hannah had to spend the night outside, crouched in the wet bushes. But another idea struck the latter; she felt herself quite fertile in expedients.

“Could you reach me up the door-key, my sweet? a big key, and it’s hanging at the back of the door,” she called through the broken window, persuasively.

“’Es,” said Joy, promptly; and thereupon slow baby steps went pattering in the darkness away toward the kitchen.

“Not there, here—here at the back of this door,” entreated Hannah, in a loud whisper. “Wherever are you going, child?”

Joy came back with a very lingering footfall, rubbing one hand along the wall, as if trying to stay herself against the influence of the voice outside representing controlling power. With all her sweet obedience in words, she did love her own way as to deeds.

“Me wanted my old dolly, first. She’s in the kitchen.”

“Oh, child, child, would you leave your poor nurse out here in the cold and wet?”

There came a gurgle of half-disbelieving laughter at the possibility of possessing such power.

“In a minute. I’ll let you in in one minute; but my dolly’s crying for me—I can hear her.”

The dolly in question was a charred torso, rejected and in disfavor when they two had left the museum, probably now in the

cinder-heap or burned. It *was* hard to lose the possibility of shelter and warmth for a toy like that.

"*Joy!* give me the key, or I'll beat you! (Oh how children drive one crazy sometimes. Lord, forgive me!) My darling, let me in, quick, quick! The organ-grinder is coming, and he'll kill poor Hannah."

At that cry, unmistakably genuine, there was a hurried fumbling, the clank of a key dropped with an alarmed "O my!" Then it was found; and two small hands put it into Hannah's fingers eagerly stretched down.

A few minutes later and the good woman stood inside the old house, and soon bolted and barred herself against the possible chance of any veritable organ-grinder. Next she stirred the banked-up kitchen fire, struck a light and found some milk and bread that made a hasty supper for the child, who was rubbing her dark eyes, divided betwixt sleep and a longing to find her horrible old doll. "And now Joy will go to her nice bed," said Hannah enticingly, taking up her nursling on one arm and holding the light.

"Yes," said the little one, drowsily, "me tired of trabbling."

Half an hour later, Joy was breathing gently in her cot, shielded from the light. As none of her clothes, except what she wore, had been carried away in their sudden flight, only the child's outer garments were taken off. Then poor Hannah, who had never yet untied her own bonnet, her whole mind had been so occupied with fears lest her pet should be over-tired, stole softly out in the dark. She had no second candle, and Joy was not used to being left without one. Still, by the kitchen fire glow Hannah managed to make a fair meal of what remains the child had left. Then the tired woman rested herself in her own straw chair, thinking to wait up for Hiram and tell him all that had happened. Hiram was foolish, but still a man's a man; and confidence is a comfort when a woman has come through such a succession of adventures as had Hannah that day. How glad she was to rest! Oh, how sweet it was to grow warm and dry, and not feel pursued and hunted any more.

Half an hour passed. Hannah found herself wondering whether Peter Quigg would return to-morrow. He was expected at that date; and truly she trusted he would, for however poor a masculine creature he might be, the house was his; and by further reasoning, so, in a manner, were those therein, whom he and the law would keep safe. He was always stirred, too, at mention of the woman he loved, and would surely say, his little person swelling with dignity, that the child and nurse he had taken under his roof at her dear request should never—

Hannah had a touch of poetry in her nature as of humor; but still, poetry and all, she nearly nodded into the fireplace that glowed dully at her feet in the kitchen's gloom.

What was that? Surely some faint noise at the window-fastenings had awakened her. The frightened woman sat upright with a start, and wondered if she had dreamed that persons outside were trying the bars; while she had dropped off asleep, imagining a situation in which her little master's tender heart and the law's majesty had overcome all enemies in a manner touching and sublime.

She listened now: nothing, no one to be heard. Still, it was very

ghostly and uncanny sitting here alone. And Hiram would probably come back slightly tipsy. She would go to bed, and tell him all when his head was clear by morning.

As she went upstairs, accordingly, Hannah noticed that the rain was over, and the moon out again; for its beams shone through the skylight. On the landing—opening a door softly, so as not to wake the child—she entered into a small passage-room, between the nursery and the other museum chambers. The moonlight shone full and bright on the window, outside which she saw that a small, oddly shaped object was moving! Hannah stood still, her heart thumping violently, as she asked herself again, *what was that?* She was on the second story; yet outside she could now distinguish that a human hand was rubbing softly along the panes. It was a large, strong hand, with no visible person attached to it, but a portion of coat sleeve. And it was feeling, feeling back and forward over the narrow sill, and the iron bars, and the glass which the latter protected.

CHAPTER X.

“A wee bush is better than nae bield.”—*Proverb.*

WHILE she stood still, during a few moments of freezing horror, Hannah understood it all. A few feet beneath the second-story window at which she gazed there was a heavy cornice above the ground-floor window, which might afford foothold to a man. This projection could just be reached, though with difficulty, from the brick wall inclosing the gravel sweep and the laurel-trees. And these same trees would help an active man to mount the wall, although the latter was so narrow and crumbling that only a cat or a monkey could have crept along it, she would have sworn—till now.

Hannah could see there was no ladder visible outside. The hand seemed touching the bars with difficulty. Yes: he was trying to hoist himself on the sill; but, unless he could get a better hand-grip, could it be done? She did not pause to consider this; but, in her wild terror, only knew at once that, if these two men were so desperate as to try to force their way in at such hazard to life and limb, they must be resolved to steal the child at any risk, and murder might come of it. For Hannah felt, stoically, that she must defend the little one with her life; ay! with every finger and nail of her hand.

A moment she thought of dashing into the next room, Joy's room, and locking herself in, then screaming for help, through the open window, into the night.

No use! There was no living soul in all the waste of timber-yards and coal-stores around. Hiram would come none the sooner. *They* outside would only know, for certain, which room to attack.

Then a vengeful idea came so suddenly into Hannah's heavy mind that the devil himself seemed to be whispering it in her ear. What if she waited till both men were on that narrow sill—*then* she might be able to push them down? “Push them down! push them down!” seemed ringing in her ears; a red flash came before her eyes, as she crept nearer and nearer, holding her breath. What if

both did break their necks? for it was a long way to the ground. It would be a good riddance! The child would grow up safe; her dear mistress have nothing to fear! It meant rest afterward to Hannah herself—no more scars on her face; no insults, or worse, to those she loved; no more of this hiding for years, or being hunted down as now. She felt the muscles of her throat swelling painfully, her brows contracting, her eyeballs distending, as with clinched hands she peered past the heavy curtain.

Without knowing it, Hannah was verily a murderess at that moment.

Now two hands grasped the window-bars. A dark form impelled by some help from below, suddenly appeared and crouched on the sill, while a head with matted hair tried to look in and search the room, which latter was fortunately almost in utter obscurity. The man was Josey, the organ-grinder. Whispers between two voices could be faintly heard. Then something of steel gleamed in the moonlight, and a slight rasping noise began upon one of the bars. They were filing it, to force their way in.

Hannah felt more bitter disappointment than fear. It was only Josey on the sill, and precarious though his position was, yet he had firm hold of one of the bars, even while sawing another. She did not wish to kill Josey, but Gaspard da Silva.

Then Hannah's knees quaked a little under her, as her own thought became clear. "Lead us not into temptation," and "Thou shalt do no murder," seemed written before her in pale letters on the wall. Her imagination recalled how the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments were inscribed tablet-wise, thus, on either side of the end window in her chapel. The scratching and biting of the file went on low but steadily. Her own thoughts grew clearer and more luminous meanwhile. It was not the devil now, but her good angel, that came and spoke to her mind. What did it matter, after all, she thought in a dogged way, if these two did kill her? It would only be a few blows, perhaps, a grasp on her throat, and her life would be out without much pain. After all, death was nothing to make a great fuss about (so think the poor, or sometimes the very miserable); still, life was sweet—and who would rear the child like herself? That was worth a struggle.

In this way, though her ideas in general flowed so sluggishly, still, quickened by the sense of danger, perchance inspired by some invisible presence—who can tell? with each grind of the instrument outside, Hannah's thoughts of how to find speedy safety within the house itself succeeded each other, like light—flash after flash.

To lock herself in Joy's room, as she had before thought. Alas! she now knew the nursery doors had no keys. Hannah herself had been neglectful; had mislaid them, or the child had taken them to play with. Oh, her own carelessness! And there was no sufficiently heavy furniture in there to barricade the doors for two minutes against strong men.

If she caught up the sleeping child, and tried to hide elsewhere in the house?

"Yes; but *where*? And how could she trust so young a child not to cry out, or by a murmur betray them both? Joy was a sweet little creature, but petted. The rest of the house, too, was all locked up.

Peter Quigg trusted his museum chambers to no care but his own; even his own rooms were always closed in his absence, he was so sensitive about his books and papers, and he could not bear the thought of any meddling with them. There was not a spot left but the stairs, kitchen, and Hiram's pantry, for the house was not large.

And down there, Hannah could think of no place but the water-butt or the flour-barrel to hide in. Oh! what *was* to be done?

At this juncture of agonized frenzy of mind, when thought stopped short, Hannah mechanically put out one hand to support herself against the side-wall, as she still crouched in the corner by the window. Her fingers touched something. She gave a great start of almost disbelieving joy, then felt it softly.

A door was beside her into one of the museum chambers, that one devoted by the deceased doctor to rare skulls and skeletons, and *the key was left in it!* There were three doors in this passage-room, one leading to the stairs, one to the nursery, and this one.

If only the men outside could be tempted in here! It was a corner room, with no other exit; *she would have them in a trap!*

Almost as soon as she had thought, Hannah turned the key gingerly with trembling fingers, so as to give the men no trouble. Then, with a catlike footfall for such a large woman, she crept round by the walls, keeping in the dark. Luckily the moonlight only fell a little way into the room, and that in the middle. The passage-door had no key either, but she drew its bolt, which, being rusty, made a slight noise.

The rasping at the window instantly stopped. Hannah's heart stopped, too; she neither stirred nor breathed for some seconds. It was not that she believed the two men outside could be frightened away; she knew one of them, her former master, too well. He was capable of firing through the window if he saw any outline of a figure, and then who could help the child?

C-r-n-ch! grr-ind! The noise went on again. Hannah saw the hand lift one bar away; the work began at the second.

No time to be lost!

She crept on now toward the nursery door on the further side of the window, thus having made the tour of the room. There were a set of foreign, savage weapons hung on the wall that she passed, long, thin assegais, poison-tipped darts. She took down several of these, and, with the cunning of weak creatures when trying to evade the strong, lightly leaned a row of javelins against the nursery door. If one slipped on the floor, the game was over. Still the light rasping outside went on. She had done, and crept now behind the window-curtain, that was luckily both long and heavy. On one side of her was the door, behind which little Joy was sleeping peacefully; close on the other was the window, with the two villains outside of it. She was between the child and danger.

The file stopped. There was a clinking sound of other tools. Then Hannah felt a draught of cold night air as the window was pushed up; there was a slight shuffling noise, and both robbers got into the room.

The nurse could have touched them. They brushed the curtain folds close to her body.

There was a murmured colloquy, and the light of a small dark lan-

tern was flashed round the room. One of the men stepped toward the passage door.

"Bolted inside; she may have come in by here then," he murmured. "You saw the light move through this room, you say. Ah! pig, beast, what are you doing over there?"

The words were in Spanish, but Hannah understood them, though muttered quite low.

Josey had come close to the nursery door, and was touching Hannah's palisade of weapons with his finger-tips. *Her* fingers felt itching to tear him away, and she felt suffocated behind the curtain, half hearing, half divining his movements, not daring to look.

"Let those sticks alone, you innocent. That door is not used, as any one with eyes might see. That rubbish belongs to the little fool's museum."

"Ah! then let us go in at once. He keeps heaps of old gold and silver, they say. Holy saints! it is a sin to be as covetous as he is. It will be a good deed to lighten his conscience for him. Quick—come!"

"Drop that spear; you shall not go in."

"Shall not—"

"No. I say so. The child is the first object, and I employed you to get her. Don't look at me like that—I have stabbed better men for less. Be quick, and obey."

"You had best be quiet then, if I am to be quick," muttered Josey, insultingly, as the other's foot touched by chance an arrow and brought it sliding to the ground. Both were silent for an instant; nothing stirred in the house. They could not hear Hannah's heart-beats just beside them, behind the curtain, though to herself these seemed so loud.

"Bah! you see, I am not so used to being a thief as you yet," angrily uttered the leader, with scornful impatience.

"Well, señor, we never know what we may come to. *Pst!* Am I a dog?"

"No, but I have hired you for to night, at least. Look here, little José, don't quarrel; get me the child first, then—why, the house will be empty enough, if we have got rid of the nurse, and you can stay and amuse yourself."

Hannah heard stoically. Her whole soul had been possessed with a longing to spring out each moment they approached the nursery door. But the knowledge that she was to be put out of the way did not affect her sensibly at the time.

The men moved cautiously across the floor to the other door. One eye watched them now closely from past the curtain's edge.

The handle was softly turned, and—not to wake the supposed sleepers in the next room—the lantern was closed.

A few steps, and they had passed inside.

At the same moment, there was a sudden spring of a heavy body across the floor. Hannah had darted out from behind the curtain, and dashing herself against the door, closed, locked, and bolted it above and below in scarcely a few breathless seconds.

A smothered yell came from within the further room. The two burglars were caught fast in a trap.

CHAPTER XI.

"Three merry boys, and three merry boys,
And three merry boys are we,
As ever did sing in a hempen string
Under the gallows-tree."

J. FLETCHER.

THERE was a minute's silence inside the skull-room. The two midnight marauders had rushed to the window to see what means of escape lay there. Then, seeing it was barred and high, they flung themselves upon the door, and, with all their strength, tried to force it.

At the same time, with all *her* strength—which was great for a woman—Hannah dragged a heavy, iron-bound chest, that stood near, and barricaded the door. At any other moment of less excitement, she could hardly have stirred the great chest a few inches; but, though the lock was strong, she dared not trust to that altogether; for already she heard those inside picking it with some instrument. Then, with still frenzied exertions, Hannah piled more furniture behind her barrier, till it would have withstood the assault of half a regiment.

Through the noise of these heavy weights being heaped on each other, she heard little Joy screaming loudly for her in childish terror, and a voice from inside the skull-room beginning a parley.

"Hannah, is that you? I know it is. Listen; we will not hurt you. I only came to see my child; that is my right."

"Yes, Meeses Nurse, we only came for to see the leetle child. Let us out, now, and you shall have much money."

"Hsh! wretch. Hannah, hear me. I am sorry that I did ever hurt you. You are alone in the house, we know. You cannot keep us in here long. But, if you will open the door peacefully, now, and let me see my child once, just once! I will promise to go away; and—and you shall never see me more."

"Hiram! Hiram!" shrieked Hannah, for all answer, at the top of her voice. "Be quick, and bring the pistols."

Then, hoping to stun her adversaries by this apparent show of help, she hastened into the nursery, caught the sobbing child to her breast—next snatching up her bonnet and shawl, that lay beside the cot as she had left them an hour ago, she prepared to rush out of this house of danger.

As she opened the door leading to the stairs, another terror met her. A ghost-like, small figure barred the way, presenting a pistol at her with one hand, and holding a lighted candle in the other.

"Stop—stop, thief. I'll fire, if you stir."

"Oh, Mr. Quigg, sir; it's me, it's Hannah," entreated the poor woman, ready to drop on her knees from the double shock. "The Lord be thanked! I never knew you were at home. Save me, save my child from those murdering villains!"

Peter Quigg, who was in his night-shirt, a red dressing-gown, and slippers, still pointed the pistol, and gazed at her, thunderstruck

in his turn. He looked indeed a comic little oddity. He had come home that evening, and, being tired, had gone to rest early; hence Hiram had treated himself to leave of absence. But Peter did not understand Hannah's appearance.

In a few words, the nurse explained all, adding, as she pointed, terrified, to the door,

"Fly, make haste; 'tis himself—Gaspard da Silva! He'll kill us all!"

That instant a smashing sound of breakage was heard inside the room. Evidently, in their fury, the prisoners were destroying all the skulls piled so carefully round the walls, and the skeletons found in the early strata, and bones of cave-dwellers, that were of the highest scientific value.

"Goths! brutes!" shouted Peter Quigg, in a rage, as the sounds of destruction went on. "What are they doing? The finest collection in England—in the world—will be ruined! Save yourself, Hannah, and the child. Send the police, send Hiram; but I must go in there and stop them. What they are doing can never be mended."

In vain Hannah almost went on her knees to persuade him to seek safety.

"I have my pistols," was all he said, the timid little man sunk in the curator, and he implored her in turn to escape quickly, that he might pull away all her defenses. So she fled out of the house in the darkness, with the child clinging round her neck, folded hastily in her shawl. They left the valiant small soul behind them, intent on defending his treasures of science, the property of his father before him.

Just down the road, under the gleam of a lamp, an unsteady figure was seen approaching by slight lurches. It was Hiram. He stared in half-tipsy surprise as Hannah caught him by the arm. "There are robbers in the house, and they'll kill the master."

"Kill my master! I'd like to see them at it. Where are they? just show them to me! I'll break their heads, or my name's not Hiram!"

So saying thickly, the really brave fellow looked about him with a savage expression, but never stirred a step.

"Oh, Hiram! Hiram! You've been drinking. Make haste home, or you'll be too late. Rouse up, man—Lord help us! what's that?"

For a dull report reached their ears, the sound coming probably clearer through the passage window left open by the thieves. Hiram started as if electrified into sobriety, then tore off toward the museum, running at his utmost speed; only shouting back to Hannah,

"Get the police, woman! I'll see to the master."

Hannah did her best, poor, weary soul. It was not long before the tramp of constables was heard echoing down the silent road, as the police hastened through alternate darkness and moonlight toward the old brick house.

Hiram, too, doubtless, did his best. But still! but still! he had neglected his duty that night, and did not get back, being tipsy, as quickly as he even otherwise might! However, this last consideration perhaps made little real difference so far as his master's fate was concerned.

CHAPTER XII.

"Ill blows the wind that profits nobody."—*Henry VI.*

WITH the instinct of a hunted hare, doubling back on her track, Hannah had fled once more to Sandybeach.

She had taken the earliest train thither, after sitting till dawn in the waiting-room.

She did not know what had happened in the museum after she had fled, but only felt in a stupid way that she must get away, away; for the police might ask her who the child was, if she returned and found them on a hot scent after the burglars; and she had been told by her mistress once not to say this; and her head was so dull at understanding intricacies of any kind; besides, Mrs. Harper was a friend, and also she had still their trunks, and any other person might have stared on seeing a woman claim shelter, almost utterly exhausted, and carrying a half-dressed child in her shawl. Furthermore, here Hannah would be in easy communication with Hiram, who could write to her what had happened.

But Hannah heard this last long before Hiram's slow fingers put pen to paper, or that he had learned her retreat. Old Harper, the sailor, brought in a newspaper that same evening of Hannah's return, containing a thrilling account of a daring burglary in the adjacent town of ——. Slowly the horrified nurse read out (helped by Mrs. Harper's quicker eyes and tongue) how that Mr. Peter Quigg, living in his own house, known popularly as "the museum," hearing robbers, as was supposed, had apparently tried to defend his valuable collection of objects of scientific and artistic value. He had attacked the intruders, it seemed; who thereupon had overpowered, disarmed, and mortally shot him with his own revolver. His servant, coming home, heard the report, and sent a woman he met to fetch the police, then he himself captured one burglar, though the other one escaped—the latter being an organ-grinder in the town, it was said; a notoriously bad character. Mr. Quigg had only lived a short time after he had been wounded, being understood to murmur with generous feeling that his terrible hurt might have been accidental. His last words were, "Tell Rachel—" and he died. The supposed murderer maintained an obstinate silence as to his own name or the cause of his victim's death, and nothing was known of him—or should be known, he had defiantly said.

So he was *gone*! poor little Peter Quigg. Hannah's eyes twinkled with most unusual tears, as she pictured to herself how he must have lain dying in a pool of blood on the floor of the old dark house she knew so well. And, but for having sheltered herself and the child, such a fate would never have happened to him! Yet human hearts are very quick to be consoled of others' woes. Soon Hannah, wiping her eyes, remembered, with a relief strangely like gladness, that "the devil was locked up;" so she phrased it. Henceforth she and the child might safely live with her dear mistress. Out of the darkness and blood of that terrible night they had passed into new days, bright with the golden light of rest and peace.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A brave old house! a garden full of bees,
Large, dropping poppies and queen hollyhocks,
With butterflies for crowns—tree-peonies
And pinks and goldilocks."—JEAN INGELow.

THE Red House Farm, belonging to George Berrington now, as it had been owned by his father and forefathers before him since the days of good King Athelstan, was a fair home for any English yeoman this spring evening.

All the broad-breasted hills lay as if sleeping around. And still the sun had not yet gone to his rest, but was lighting up the wide valley, with its smiling landscape of fresh green fields and scattered, snug brown homesteads, except where the shadow of the hills fell.

This was a rich, fertile land, through which the Chad slipped smoothly, brown and clear, having left its home of wild moors and heather stretches behind, away up on the hills. It had dashed down in whiteness and roar into the sudden stillness of the dark glen of the ford, and then foamed and fretted among its rocks; and so, having shown itself to be a little river of spirit, as if some demon of the moor haunted its well-spring, it now only laughed in the happy sun, and vexed itself no more. It wound, in many an idle curve, through the Red Farm lands, of which its water-spirit seemed here the guardian angel. For the stream nourished tribes of darting trout for the sport and subsequent supper-table of generations of Berringtons. And it made fat their meadows, where their successive herds of red kine had grazed peacefully for hundreds of years. Likewise, it shallowed here and there with rippling brightness into wider places that formed tiny sandy bays, where the soft-eyed red cattle came conveniently to drink. And here water-flags would flourish, bearing golden irises aloft. But as to flowers, there was a very largess and royal bounty of them along the Chad. Mercy on us! The glory of the marsh marigolds in its boggy places, and the yellow brilliance of its broad buttercup meadows this spring evening might verily make one's eyes ache. The Field of the Cloth of Gold! Ay, that was most like it—but still, Art can never come near Nature in her width and spread of splendor. And so this evening, far and wide, the large, low acres of the Red House pastures were blowing in fragile, living, little gold stars.

They say the cattle like little the acrid taste of the crowfoot; but still higher up the slopes was such abundance of sweet grass for them, that every green blade, in a different manner, became also changed into auriferous hue, that of butter. While the color of the brilliantly burnished galaxy of glory of the golden flowers fringing the river's bed might seem as a happy omen to the Berrington house of men and women, who, if they had never waxed rich, yet had their seasons of prosperity, as the buttercups had theirs; and, even on wintry days of apparent blight, still likewise kept their roots safe underground.

On this special evening the Red House had caught in passing, as

it seemed, all the sinking sun's rays, which were reflected back from its glittering, diamond-paned, leaded casements.

It was a fine, substantial old farmhouse, backed by its outhouses, like a group of stout and loyal servants; and it faced to the front a pleasant strip of garden-ground, full of pot-herbs and sweet flowers. An orchard lay to one side, blossoming now in white and pink—clouds come down to earth awhile. On the other was a smooth lawn, fit to play bowls on, and bearing out Lord Bacon's saying, in his essay on a garden, that "nothing is more pleasant to the eye than green grass, kept finely shorn."

The Red House itself was built firstly of moor-stone, in the foundations and upward, as high as a man's waist. But then the walls, up to the roof, were of brick, mellowed by age, but still of an agreeable, warmly red hue. There was much fine woodwork in it, of intersecting beams, and hanging carved eaves, and thick oak window-mullions. Inside were deep window-seats, made to be sat upon in seclusion and comfort during several generations; also it had a wide, if short and shallow, staircase, protected by a truly noble balustrade of thick oak—the whole having been built in the days when wood and work and time were not stinted.

The roof was of tiles just enough weather-stained not to be glaring. It showed as a spot of pleasant color for miles around, backed by the fresh green of its embosoming oak-trees, made picturesque by high chimneys ornamented with twisted patterns and brightened by gilt, giddy weather-vanes, a cock on one gable, an arrow on the other, that turned with the breeze in rivalry of each other and twinkled in the sunlight.

The farm buildings were of far older date than the house, which latter had been rebuilt when one former Blyth Berrington had married an heiress of gentle blood and fair fortune, who loved the handsome yeoman in spite of what her friends might say. The barns, linnhays, and so forth, seemed indeed almost a part of the very earth around, as a tree may be said to be that grows up therefrom, or as rocks imbedded in the soil. For their gray moor-stone walls had stood through so many ages of man that thick fringes of green ferns, spleenworts, hart's-tongue, and polypody grew wherever they could find roothold, and the heavy thatched roofs were green with house-leek, and orange or rusty-brown with lichen. But all along under their eaves was painted a broad red line to match the house; as also the heavy old doors and shutters were fresh painted every spring, as now, of the same blood-red color. The Red House was Farmer Berrington's pride, as well as his plaything and his home. He loved to keep it always bright with paint, fresh scoured, and smiling; and to dig the flower borders round its walls; to *dress* it, as he would his wife had she lived, and also because she had loved the house.

So, on this fair evening the old Red House looked its best, and spring was in its glory.

Farmer Berrington leaned on his gate, resting his arms on the broad topmost bar, the day's labor being well done. A long file of his red milch-cows came slowly up from the meadow, and as they passed him their breath sweetened the air. Little Blyth, who was continually climbing the gate and then slipping down again for the pleasure of exercising himself, huzzaed at them, flourishing a long

willow switch with which he had just helped to drive home the stately geese and their gosling broods from their pasture on the waste land where the roads crossed. But the mild-eyed cows hardly quickened their heavy gait, and only flicked their sleek sides with their tails as who should say, "We know you."

"Boy," said his father, while slowly chewing a straw, and looking round with a smile, "do you see our wagon coming back from Moortown? I wonder what Dick may be bringing now for 'ee." The caressing familiarity of the latter words at once signified to Blyth that some pleasure was in the wind; some gift on the road.

"What!" he exclaimed, his rosy cheeks flushing and his blue eyes brightening, almost jumping in his joy off the gate on which he sat astride. "Is there something for me in the wagon? Oh, what is it? Is it that new knife you promised me; or a kite, or—oh, do tell me, father, what it is?"

"Softly, boy. There is something for you in the wagon; but I never promised to say what. Patience is a virtue. Come—it might be a new lesson-book. Whatever it is, I thought you would like it; so try to be pleased if even you would have liked something else a little better."

"I will, dad, thank you," said Blyth, trying to assume a bold, manly air, though the poor little fellow's face had fallen at the idea of the lesson-book, and, child-like, he added audibly under his breath, "but I do hope it's something to play with."

The farmer's face softened curiously as he looked sideways at his small son. "It must be dull to be a tender young soul like that, and have no one to understand it rightly," was vaguely in his mind.

There were no neighbors' farms near. He did not like Blyth to mix in play much with any of the few poor cottagers' children round. He himself felt too unable to rouse up under the heavy weight of his bodily nature (his innermost spirit being quiet and brooding also) so as to come out of himself and meet the child on equal ground, as some folk might. Of this incapacity he was sadly aware, feeling lacking as a parent, at times. If his young wife had lived, indeed, he would have seemed no worse (no, truly!) than many fathers; but—she had not! And Dick and the herd and the serving-maids were rough and uncouth; no better comrades, but worse, than himself. So he was sorry for his boy, and therefore had in truth told Dick to bring back a kite.

Blyth was not sorry for himself.

The wagon was creaking nearer and nearer along the road. He could see Bilberry and Whortleberry, two good farm-horses, brown and bay respectively, bearing proudly their heavy harness with its brass-mounted trappings shining brightly in the evening sun. How they arched their necks, jingled their bells, and stepped out faster stableward, while the wheels rumbled nearer, and their big hoofs sounded with more resonant clang! And now they were close at hand. There was Dick's weather-beaten visage, looking out from under the wagon-cover with its expression of aged simplicity just dashed with sly cunning. But what—who was this?

A little girl, the prettiest child ever seen, was standing up in the wagon and peering out past Dick.

"Gee-up. Whoa!" With a final creak and strain the big wagon stopped before the house-gate, instead of turning into the farmyard.

Dick got down. The little girl stretched out both arms with a strange, short cry of joy. She had dark rings of soft hair, and great black eyes, and a small red mouth that laughed; and she seemed hailing Blyth on the gate, and the Red House behind, and the flowers, and trees, cows, pigs—all she saw. Blyth, with his yellow head bare, and his blue eyes wide, stared transfixed.

"Well, master, I've brought back more than I was sent for," began Dick, shuffling his foot apologetically, as the farmer with some surprise came near. "But there's a woman inside there with the little maid. I found her at Moortown, and asking her way to Farmer Berrington of the Red House. And her said, her was bound to come to you. So I gave them a lift, for the poor creature was nigh worn out with traveling."

"But who is she?" asked Berrington, in a low whisper, as a very ugly brown woman, though a decently dressed one, got slowly down from the wagon, being stiff and cramped in her legs. But, as Dick could not answer, she, coming up, said, simply,

"I'm Hannah, the child's nurse."

"Hannah—the nurse," repeated the farmer, doubtfully, as he looked her in the face with no better knowledge of what else she might be; then, with a ray of understanding lighting up the darkness of his mind, he said, "O—h!" Next he pursed up his mouth into a silent whistle, looked at the child, and said, "I see— But what brings you here? *They* don't expect you."

(Dick, well trained to his master's dislike of listeners or meddlers, had gone forward to the shafts; and with one ear vainly cocked stood bandying words in a teasing way with the child, who was eagerly prattling, and begging to be lifted down.)

"I know; I know," said Hannah, with anxious eagerness. "Miss Rachel always wrote me it wasn't safe. But now things are changed, with God's blessing, who brought us on our journey here."

Then she gave a rapid account of her late adventures, and the death of poor Peter; ending,

"So I thought mother and child ought not to be parted any more, now there was no danger in bringing them together. And, knowing that you have been to them both like a strong rock and a tower of defense, as we may say—for which the Lord reward you!—here I came straight. What else could I do?"

A parley ensued for some few minutes between the good farmer and his uninvited guest.

"You must rest the night here anyhow, for 'tis too late to go up the glen," said Berrington, at last. "Be heartily welcome."

Then he went to the child. "Now, my pretty dear, let me lift you down. Do you think you would like this for a home, eh?" He spoke in his hospitality, without much meaning, thinking just to please her fancy with his roof-tree for a night or two. But little Joy cried, "Yes, yes," and running up to Blyth, off whom she had not taken her eyes, as he had as eagerly watched her, she held up her rosy lips to be kissed. Blyth bent down and his lips met hers; the elders looking on with the admiring air age shows toward innocence.

"Oh, father," cried Blyth now, catching his parent by the coat, with his face all alight, "is this the present you promised me? Say, is it?"

"How would you like her, Blyth?"

"A little sister. Oh, I should like her better than anything—except, perhaps, my pony," exclaimed Blyth, adding the last words with native caution blending naturally with his enthusiasm. "She is so pretty."

"Well—" said the farmer; then, after a long pause, adding again, slowly, "Well—who knows; it may be the boy speaks best. Yes, my lad; I hope she may be a little sister to you. And, now, come indoors to supper."

CHAPTER XIV.

"The whitewashed wall, the nicely sanded floor.
The varnished clock that clicked behind the door."

GOLDSMITH.

"YES; I've been put about over-much this by-last week, it's true, Mr. Berrington. But still I hardly feel able to rest like, till I've seen my dear mistress," said Hannah that night, relapsing into her northern dialect, as was usual with her when quite at ease.

She was sitting opposite Farmer Berrington now, after supper. The big fireplace of the room, which was partly front-kitchen, partly dwelling-room, had a pleasant, if moderate, glow. Now his young wife was dead, the farmer mostly sat here; the two pleasant parlors too strongly reminded him she was absent. All round the great oaken dressers, full of crockery or shining copper vessels, and the heavy tables, were scoured as bright as a new pin. The red tiled floor shone from soap and water, as freshly clean as the hard, red strand down at the Chad's mouth after an ebb tide.

Fine hams, beside big flitches of bacon, hung from the rafters ceiling on one side, noble Cheddar cheeses on the other.

The whole place silently told of plenty, of peace and comfort. Hannah heaved a satisfied sigh, as her gaze traveled, with house-keeping cognizance, around. Yet she repeated, forcing her mind from the temptation of dwelling on these delectable sights to the subject that ought to be uppermost.

"I *have* been thinking that long to see her! Why, it's four years since, and the poor creature will be just as glad to see me to-morrow, I know! Why—what is it?"

For Berrington, with an utterly stolid expression on his contented, well-fed visage, only slowly compressed his lips, and wagged his head in dissent. Then, after taking a long whiff at his pipe, he said, with kindly gravity,

"I'm afraid it's a black week up at the cottage. Best bide a bit, mayhap."

"How do you know? Have you seen her?"

"No; but I've *heard* her!"

The significance of his meaning was fully grasped by the nurse, who looked at him blankly a moment, then let her hands fall heavily in her lap. Berrington softly pulled at the front of his coat by the button-hole, to relieve himself from feeling awkward. This is a trick common enough in many of his class.

"Dear—oh, dear! So her poor head is bad again. I did hope that would be righted when she'd got safe away from *him*. It was his wickedness sent it wrong before. Oh, my! But, do tell me now, is she really bad?"

"I fear so."

Berrington overlooked the feminine foolishness of asking twice what had been answered once. Nay, more, much as he loved taciturnity, and most especially after supper, over his pipe, he unlocked his lips further, to add,

"Cheer up. What's quickly come is lightly gone mostly; and I saw them both out walking on the moors a week ago. I'll find means to let Miss Rachel know you've come; and maybe she'll see you—even to-morrow. That's a *good* woman; ay, a lady from her heart's core to the nails of her fingers."

The farmer solemnly nodded his head to confirm his word, till his vast double chin and his whiskers made meeting with the ample folds of his blue neckcloth.

"Miss Rachel! Miss Rachel! It's always Miss Rachel with men, and never Miss Magdalen; Peter Quigg was the same," muttered Hannah, half crossly. Then, feeling herself ungracious, added, "But the Lord bless you for all your goodness to them both. It was he raised you up to be a friend when they fled from the wickedness of the great world into the desert, so to speak. Why, you knew nothing of them before."

Berrington shook his head.

"Naught." Then, puffing at his pipe, added, with a seriousness akin to sadness, "But one day, when my wife was just buried, I was standing by her fresh grave, and looked up and saw Miss Rachel. My heart was softened, which she perceived. So when she asked after my cottage, and I replied 'twas no fit dwelling for ladies, she maybe trusted me more than might otherwise have been."

"When they parted from me and the child, they said they had heard of this in their youth as a wild place, but with kindly people," hazarded Hannah, watching his face, curious to draw forth any further information.

Berrington dryly smiled, which wrinkled his eyes quizzically at the corners. But he only said,

"I'm most sorry for women in this world. They've more to bear and less strength than us. Well, let's hope 'tis made up to them in heaven. I'd ha' endeavored to be a good husband longer to my wife, but she couldn't stay with me, being ready for a better place, you see. So I try"—puff, puff—"I try to make things easier to other women, as if 'twas done to her. That's my rule in life. Good-night now; and to-morrow we'll see about this."

Nurse Hannah slept deep and sound that night at the Red House farm, in a good feather bed, and between sheets that had been dried on a sweetbrier hedge, the faint scent of which gave her dreams of her youth long ago in the bonny, fresh, northern lowlands. And beside her lay little Joy, like a folded poppy-bud, in her rosy sleep; as Blyth lay in an adjoining room equally happy, in the same blissful slumbers of their age.

And both children dreamed of each other.

CHAPTER XV.

“ A l’heure où le soleil s’élève,
 Où l’arbre seut monter la sève,
 La vallée est comme un beau rêve;
 La brume écarte son rideau:
 Partout la nature s’éveille,
 La fleur s’ouvre, rose et vermeille;
 La brise y suspend une abeille,
 La rosée—une goutte d’eau.”

—VICTOR HUGO.

Two days and a night after Hannah and the child had come to the Red House, Rachel Stone, as we may now call her, stole out of her cottage very early in the morning.

She stopped and listened several times if any sound could be heard coming from the little brown house she had just left. Then, reassured, she at last went on with quicker, less careful, footfall by the river’s bank toward the Logan-stone.

No human creature was in sight around. She was too early, having no clock in their poor abode; and though now used to regulate time by the sun, impatience had made her believe him already high this morning.

It was not yet six o’clock. She stood beside the huge rock, and, letting her hood fall backward, inhaled deep draughts of morning air, while the sweet-scented moorland breeze played about her dark tresses, cooling her weary brows. There was a charm of birds, as the saying is in that country, to be heard all around. Among the bushes and alders by the river, the little feathered musicians of the air were still singing lustily with full throats, as if in welcome of the dawn. It was their hour, as yet, to enjoy possession of the earth, before “Man goeth forth to his work and to his labor, until the evening.”

How *new*, how doubly fair the whole earth seemed, still wet with its daily baptism of dew, thought Rachel. Then the sun rose fully over the hills before her, and all the valley broadened and brightened, fully waking to the day. O blessed orb, reviver of the earth, before which even the black terrors begotten of night in the human heart flee away! Who could not well-nigh forget all the wickedness of the world and also the troubles of the barely past dark hours, she thought? And so, while grateful for the sun and wind and nature’s consoling influences around her, Rachel’s heart swelled in praise to the Light Giver; to the God of earth and sea and air.

With one hand resting on the side of the gray lichened monolith, her black dress falling in long, severe folds of drapery, her head upraised and her beautiful dark eyes turned to the sky, this woman might have been a priestess of Phœbus. But her words were less pagan in their devoutness, while her lips, murmuring, repeated,

“ How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean,
 Are thy returns! e’en as the flowers in spring.

* * * * *

Grief melts away
 Like snow in May,
 As if there were no such cold thing.”

Brave old George Herbert's rejoicing after his affliction rejoiced her too.

She looked, shading her eyes, across the meadows stretching toward the Red House. For, lo, the joy of a new interest she had wished for, the gladness of a little child's life to brighten the gray twilight of her own and her sister's existences, had come. It was not even her own doing; of which she was thankful—dreading, poor soul, what Magdalen might do or say when restored to her senses.

Rachel was a young woman still; and the past three years, of a life almost that of a recluse in this lonely valley, had been heavy and dark upon her. Nay, perhaps that first year had been a rest, when her soul was still crushed and sore with a great sorrow. Then the loneliness of the wide moors, the almost total absence of speech between herself and Magdalen, had been best for both sisters, who suffered strangely from the same cruel wrong. But often during the past two years, there was, alas! no longer silence.

There were sometimes hours made hideous by cries, by bitter reproaches hurled against herself as a traitress, a wicked woman, in that past dreadful trial. And Rachel was always silent, out of her great love to that distracted, pretty creature. Poor Magdalen! her weak head had never been able to control the violent impulses of a generous but passionate heart; less so now than ever.

They were coming. Two figures were approaching over the young grass of the meadow, all speckled with daisies and buttercups.

They threw long shadows behind them in the morning sun. Farmer Berrington was conducting Hannah to the accustomed tryst.

Then Rachael went forward, stretching out both hands to Hannah, her eyes shining like dark suns.

"Oh, Hannah," she said, "I can never thank you enough for all you have done for us both, and the child, since we parted. You have been a good and faithful servant. May He who blessed such, reward you!"

Hannah, confused, and half ashamed at feeling her thick hands held in that delicate yet close clasp, made a short courtesy with her dumpy person, being old-fashioned in her up-bringing. Then, finding her hands gently loosed, wiped her eyes for a second with the corner of her shawl, yet answered, rather doggedly,

"Whatever I did was only my duty. And I did it out of love to Miss Magdalen—asking pardon for calling her so still; but I've been used to it ever since I first went to your dear mother as nursemaid, and *she* but a slip of a child."

"Of course; the old name comes naturally," said Rachel, gently, never showing by any change in her sweet voice that she noticed the slight ungraciousness which implied nought had been done for love of herself. And yet, though so morally strong, she was a most sensitive woman; and her soul, that had already in life sounded the deepest diapason of agony, could even still answer with a light, inner note of pain to so slight a jar as this.

Then she rapidly asked:

"But, Hannah, tell me! How—why was it you came with the child? Why did you leave Mr. Quigg? I hope there is no bad news?"

As slowly, Hannah made dubious answer:

"Bad news! Well, no—not to say bad. Providence's ways is mysterious; and it's an ill wind blows nobody luck. So, any way, it was all made safe for us ones—an' I com'."

Berrington here interposed. He had been keeping aloof, from delicacy, till now; but, either hearing or guessing what was coming, made shift to say his say first.

"Your pardon, Miss Rachel, but I must be going to my laborers now. Mistress Hannah will find her way back, surely. And seeing one can speak you so seldom (ay, verily—about once in six months), I will make bold to put before you a thought that came to my mind yesterday, or maybe earlier, hoping it may not be disagreeable."

"Pray go on, Mr. Berrington," said Rachel, in an involuntarily altered voice, as if speaking from a distance, across the desert of loneliness with which she felt surrounded. As mechanically, she rapidly pulled her hood over her head, which, in the excitement of meeting Hannah, she had left fallen backward.

"Why, here it is. Seeing the little maid and her nurse here have come to bide among us, I would be mortally glad to have them stay at the Red House Farm. Children is best company for children, and my boy Blyth would be sorry already to part with the little girl. It is but a rough home, perhaps, for her, with no mistress now to order things as a gentlewoman likes them; for delicacy keeps plenty in its place. But still it might be better for an infant than being up here at the cottage—at times." His voice had fallen quite low at the last words, and he looked steadily toward a pair of hoodie crows flying across the sky.

Rachel was quite affected by the truly chivalrous thoughtfulness underlying the farmer's stolid manner.

"You are very good; I hardly know what to say," she murmured. "It is not for me to decide, but still I believe, I feel, you are right."

"Very well, ma'am. No need to answer in a hurry. Let them stay now till it can be decided; then, if 'tis yes, why, we must all try a bit, with good-will, to see how the plan works." Whereupon Berrington turned sideways, preparatory to departure; adding in a careless, lower key, "And as to board or lodging for such a little one, and her so pretty, too, it need never be mentioned between us."

"No, no, no! Mr. Berrington!" exclaimed Rachel. "You are too generous; and you do not understand. We are not poor, indeed; we are almost rich."

But, even as she spoke, the farmer was gone, lifting his hat respectfully, but with a deprecatory wave of his big stick.

"Well, well, we shall find means to settle all that, if Magdalen wishes it so. It *would* make all easy; heaven opens doors out of difficulties," Rachel murmured; then added, with an explanatory smile to Hannah, though her lips trembled; "We must be quick now. You have so much to say that I long to hear. But I dare not leave her long. She was sleeping quietly at last when I left, poor soul. We had a terrible night together."

Hannah gravely nodded; no more; but felt touched in her heart, too, though she *was* jealous of Miss Rachel at times for her own dear lady's sake. She did not tell how Farmer Berrington had brought

her to within a few yards of the little brown cottage in the night past, nor how, while the lantern shone, sending forth faint rays to where they stood, and the night breeze came down sweet and fresh from the moors, they had heard through the mud walls the moans and cries of a spirit as if under temporary demoniac possession. Poor Magdalen, and also poor Rachel! They had heard the latter's voice, too, though that storm of passions, steady in prayer, as one could guess without hearing the words, wrestling in spirit, as if she could herself cast forth by faith the tormenting demon.

But Hannah said nought. The sisters had made their home in the desolate glen not to be spied upon.

The two now sat down, side by side, on the rocks that were the base of the Logan-stone, and began to talk eagerly.

"How was it safe for you to come, Hannah?"

"Because the devil deserted his own for once, maybe to drive a harder bargain next time. *He's* got penal servitude for some years," said Hannah, with jubilant vindictiveness.

"He! Who?"

"Why, that Gaspard da Silva. Who else?"

Even as she spoke, Hannah remembered—then, though so lately touched with pity, could not resist the feminine curiosity of looking in Miss Rachel's face, just to see "how she took it."

Rachel Estonia felt numbed for a moment, then conscious of a sharp, great pain at the news. But, knowing that curious gaze was upon her, she bore herself bravely, and would not flinch. The nurse did not guess from her noble face how great the relief would have been to scream aloud, to cover her face, and mourn in sackcloth and ashes that the proud were so degraded. The dawn seemed black, and her heart nigh bursting with bitter pain. Then, the first anguish past, the after sadness was almost as terrible—the horror and penitence of feeling herself well-nigh a wicked woman for that very pain; seeing, on the bare sands of her memory, the ribs of the wreck of her once fair ship of hopes. On, she had hoped, prayed, that remembrance might be covered evermore henceforth from her own inner sight by waters of oblivion. Dear Lord! she had so striven not to sin thus in thought, though stainless in word or by deed.

"Go on," she said only. "Tell me all about it."

So Hannah told her all.

When the latter ended with poor Peter Quigg's death—at which she had not hinted before—Rachel started, cried out, and then was at no pains to hide her emotion. Why should she? He had loved her devotedly, ever since he had met her, while traveling, now several years ago. Those were her happy days. And she had refused him; but, both being noble souls, she had known how to convert a lover to a friend.

So he was *dead*—poor Peter! For a few minutes, with bowed head, her face hidden under her hood, Rachel felt almost as if she herself was his murderess. It was she who had asked him to shelter her sister's child and its nurse at a time of great sorrow and peril to them all. And he, always loyal, had never hesitated, but risked the disturbance of his recluse-like habits, of responsibilities, even dangers, such as had at last too truly come; all this to shield the child of the man whom he had most cause to hate, or at least think of with an-

ger and envy. And *Gaspard da Silva had shot him!* Rachel felt no doubt which burglar did the deed, in her own sad heart. It numbed her faculties to think of it. The thought was indeed so dreadful, that, like some women who have suffered great mental trials, and thus invisibly shielded themselves from succumbing in mind or body, she took refuge in a present dullness of feeling, thinking to herself she would have time enough for mourning in the days to come. Yes, this year, then next year, and the year after; and, maybe, a succession of years, all long and silent, passed among these quiet moors.

"And for many years—how long will he be in prison?" she asked, feeling choked.

"That I don't know for certain. The trial was not on yet, the paper I saw only said he was sure to get five years, or ten. And I came here then."

"Uncertainty again. But still, *this* time it may be best," sighed Rachel to herself. Then aloud, "Perhaps Berrington might be able to learn, though we seem at the world's end here. But, Hannah, how can I ever tell my sister? My heart bleeds for her. Even when she is recovered, it might unsettle her reason again—perhaps for life."

Hannah looked aghast at the dreadful possibility, which had never struck her before. Rachel's heart sunk too, lower than even before.

"No, it won't make me mad. It has restored me to my reason, quite on the contrary, as you may see," said Magdalen's voice, close beside them.

Both started in horror, and she appeared from behind the Logans-stone, disordered in dress, certainly, having huddled merely a skirt and shawl over her night garments. But her blue eyes were steady enough; her face, no longer flushed, was indeed very pale but for two slight hectic spots. They gazed transfixed.

"Yes," she went on, "my wrongs are avenged. Gaspard is in prison. Now he will learn what stone walls are like, the living death to which he condemned his wife. It is righteous—it is just. The moment the words left your lips, Hannah, I felt electrified into my full senses again."

She placed one hand lightly on her head as she spoke, and stood so a minute; then extended it to Hannah, who, faithful creature, covered it with kisses and tears.

"Poor Hannah! How fond you always were of me! Come, I will kiss you myself, for you have been very good."

Thereupon she touched her old maid's cheek with her lips as gracefully and lightly as she did everything.

"Oh, my dearie, my dearie! But how did you come to hear all? And, Lord help us, with your feet bare, too!" uttered Hannah, gazing down on the dew-wet greensward with horror, while Rachel, too, perceived the fact for the first time.

"It cools my brain," said Magdalen, carelessly looking down at the pretty feet that peeped bare from under her skirts. "What brought me here, you dear, foolish old Hannah? Why, I saw Miss Rachel there getting up early very cautiously, so I was cunning enough to pretend being asleep, and then crept out here after her. I've been crouched behind that old stone till I'm cramped; and you

would both murmur so low sometimes, I quite longed to call out to you to speak louder. No matter—I heard enough.”

“Well, now you will come home, dear. You must have your feet dried, and get some warmer clothing; besides, you have hardly eaten anything the last two days,” urged Rachel, concealing her anxiety under tenderness of voice.

“Oh, yes; would Hannah like to come and see the mud hovel we call *home*, eh?”

“Shall I come a while later to-day and bring the child? You’ll be thinking sore long to see your own child, my dearie.”

A sort of shudder ran through Magdalen’s body.

“The child! To-day! Oh! I cannot. Tell her it would not be good for me, Rachel. You know my poor head might not be able to stand it. Another time—perhaps in a week, Hannah.”

“Say the day after to-morrow. She and Berrington will think you so unnatural,” whispered Rachel.

“Very well,” acceded Magdalen, not too willingly. “Then the day after to-morrow, Hannah. Good-by now,” and she waved her hand in farewell.

Hannah watched both the sisters as they went away, Rachel’s tall, dark figure supporting Magdalen, who winced and clung to her arm, crying out sharply if a thorn touched her feet.

After a few steps Rachel stopped, and, hastily pulling off her own shoes, put them on her sister. The nurse felt a tightness across her chest, as she too turned to go. A curious disappointment, too, she was aware of, but could hardly account for.

“Poor dear, it was that her mind had been so unhinged. When I bring her the child it will all be right; all be like old times again,” she thought.

CHAPTER XVI.

“Sorrows succeed.

When one is past, another care we have:
Thus woe succeeds a woe as wave a wave.”

HERRICK.

BUT when, two days later, Hannah, who had been carrying little Joy for the last quarter of a mile, set her down on the dried mud floor of Cold-home Cottage, all was not yet right.

The little one was frightened at the strange place, so bare and uninviting, and hung back as they entered. She was scared, too, by the black dresses and hoods of the sisters, and, being still unused to strangers, turned and hid her head obstinately in Hannah’s apron. Magdalen looked at her curiously and critically, as the nurse made efforts to disengage the tight baby grasp.

“Is she always like that?” she asked.

Then Rachel went near, and, going down on her knees, managed, by pretty, coaxing words and loving enticements, to draw the black curly head round to spy at her. Presently Joy, as was her custom when pleased, promptly kissed Rachel full and unasked with her rosy lips. At that Magdalen sprung forward with a jealous exclamation, caught up the child, and half angrily covered her with hasty,

almost harsh, kisses. Joy cried out in alarm, as was natural; Magdalen was enraged. There was some ado to pacify them both.

"It is so long since she saw you. How could she remember?" pleaded Rachel.

"Don't you know who the lady is, my birdie?" murmured Hannah, caressingly, soothing her charge. "Why, she is your own—"

"Hush!" screamed Magdalen. "I forbid you to tell her."

"I beg pardon; I—I thought you meant to tell her to-day, surely," stuttered Hannah, frightened. "I've told her nothing, even as we came along. I thought it not right till she'd seen you; but now—"

"No, I will not have it. You think he is safe, but I know him; stone walls will never hold him. Then it will all begin again, and we must separate and fly; so it is better she should know nothing. Besides, she must live at the Red House—I wish it so; when she grows older, she would only be asking inconvenient questions if she knew who we were."

Hannah would have demurred, amazed, but that Rachel sorrowfully signed to her it was so to be. Then the child was bidden play in the cottage kitchen, while all three women watched her.

It was a strange dwelling for two ladies of gentle breeding: so Hannah thought silently in her mind, wondering. It was almost utterly bare, but how spotless! The earthen floor was so clean one might have dined on it; the solitary deal table and dresser were scoured white as milk; the few tin utensils shone like silver. These were signs of Rachel's daily toil. The only touches of color and softness were some feather cushions, covered with bright stuff, piled on the wooden settle by the fireplace, where Magdalen generally stretched herself. Also a heavy rug was placed here, to keep her feet warm, made of bits of cloth coarsely knitted together with cord; such rugs are sometimes seen in peasant cottages. Rachel's delicate fingers had worked that. Also the two straw chairs, made much after the shape and manner of a beehive, were disguised likewise under bright coverings. Magdalen's guitar on the settle; her footstool—that was all! Not another sign of taste, of educated mind, of ease (for though Rachel had a few books—Milton, Shakespeare, Dante, and Goethe—they were carefully hidden away in a little locked box, kept under her pallet-bed in the next room). Other poor cottages on the moors had surely more articles for use, or even pleasure. Here were no tall wooden clock, no flowers in the window, no purring cat, or cheerful fowls cackling on the threshold; nothing. Hannah's grieved mind thought the room like a cell presently, in spite of the cushions, the guitar, and the nosegays of wild flowers that poor Rachel had placed here and there. Then a thought struck her. *It was a cell; here was nothing to be broken!* She had, indeed, understood the matter. Once, when they first came, Rachel had tried the softening influences of a few pretty objects on which to rest the eye; procuring what she could at Moortown, through Farmer Berrington. Then one dreadful night came, and by morning all was shivered, smashed, rent in a thousand fragments; and worse, a caged linnet dying. Again she had tried the experiment with like disas-

trous results, then gave it up. After all, nature was beautiful and bright enough out of doors, except in the terrible winter.

For a minute or two little Joy slowly and conscientiously walked round, examining the big fireplace with its ingle nook, the little window in which hung the old lantern. There was nothing to play with.

"This is an ugly house; Joy doesn't like it as much as *our* house," she innocently said.

"There; you see!" said her mother, significantly. "Juanita, come here—speak to me; why did you call yourself Joy? You are Juanita."

"No, no. *Joy!*" persisted the child, laughing, and shaking her soft, curly, dark head.

"What, does she not even know her own name? Not that I gave it her—the nuns who visited the asylum baptized her when they thought I was dying."

"It was such an outlandish name," apologized Hannah, looking hot. For she was such a stickler for all that was British, she hated the idea of returning to the foreign "*Juanita*" she had so cleverly evaded. "She always had a trick of calling herself something like Joy as a baby, so I just let it rest so."

"May not we too, Magdalen? Our Joy—it is a pretty idea," said Rachel. Her sister smiled assentingly. When at the same time the child unluckily exclaimed, "Yes, yes; I'm Joy—Joy likes you!" and prettily running forward and looking up for sympathy in Rachel's face, she leaned—drawn by some secret sympathy—against her knee.

"Take her away. She is her father's own daughter; *she likes you best!*" passionately exclaimed Magdalen. "Yes, I could see it in her face the moment she came in; and she has his eyes. She is an unnatural little wretch. Oh, my child, my child, you don't care for me either." She rushed into the next room, weeping; it was their bedroom, the only other room. Rachel followed her there, in spite of denials, strong in her love. Presently the complaints inside were pacified by degrees, but when Rachel came out it was to say, softly but briefly, the two visitors must go. Nevertheless, she herself hugged the child in a long, warm embrace, and then squeezed Hannah's hand.

So nurse and child went slowly back through the wet meadows, for it was a rainy spring afternoon.

It had been a disastrous day.

Yet, besides the overt disappointment, the nurse felt again that of the previous meeting now intensified. What was this doubt at her heart? She did not find her mistress as perfect as she had believed her these last three years. She did not love her *anear as much as she had done in absence*. Then the faithful woman blamed herself bitterly; poor Hannah!

CHAPTER XVII.

"Sweet country life, to such unknown,
Whose lives are others, not their own!

* * * * *

O happy life! if that their good
The husbandmen but understood!
Who all the day themselves doe please,
And younglings with such sports as these,
And, lying down, have nought to affright
Sweet sleep, that makes more short the night."

HERRICK.

So, as was now agreed, Joy and her nurse lived at the Red House. There could hardly have been a happier home for any child than this farm, lying warm and sheltered toward the south in its rich pasture-lands, with behind it the hills and the sweet heather for leagues and leagues. In-doors there reigned peace, plenty, and smiling faces. Out-doors were wide horizons, the large air to bring roses on the cheeks, and perfect liberty.

One small matter had given Hannah some trouble: this was the child's name when the farm-folk began to ask natural questions. Magdalen hotly refused to let her bear her father's name or even the grand-maternal one of Mendoza. It was dangerous, she darkly said, haunted by the fear of Da Silva appearing some day on their track. Stone again, denoted too clearly the child's connection with the cottage—at which wondering tongues would have wagged. "And to call her only Joy is to miscall the child, Farmer Berrington. Why even the very cows here have Christian names," she said, almost in tears.

George Berrington's phlegm was moved to consideration.

"'Tis true enough, folks *will* ask questions; and, if they get no answer, at times they'll talk the more," he mused.

He considered the matter over three pipes that evening in the porch, and finally thus announced his mind thereupon:

"Some name the little maid should have that will attract small attention; for it's better to be little known than ill-spoken of, as the saying is. Now—if no better can be found—I'm thinking my dead wife would be heartily glad to lend the child what help would lie in hers. Haythorn it was, and I know of no cousins or kin of hers; so that, if neighbors suppose the infant to be somehow related to her, none can dispute it. Furthermore, it's a good name. May she wear it as it deserves, for it will never disgrace her."

This offer (not made without a sense of generous effort) was received with true gratitude by Rachel, and graciously condescended to by Magdalen.

"Of course it need be only for a time—while we stay here," the latter said.

As for Hannah, the relief of this arrangement was great. Her own thick-headedness in making evasive answers as to the child's parentage no longer puzzled her. She had only to say, "Her name! Why, the same as the dead Mrs. Berrington. Ask the farmer, he

can tell you best." Which last suggestion few of the farm-folk carried out, as can be guessed. Berrington had said so little about his young wife or her people that the parentage of a scapegrace Haythorn was easily invented by the people around and fathered on little Joy, and so the wonder was presently forgotten.

Blyth and the little maid became fast friends. How they played together that spring—ay, and many more—in the orchard, where the sleek, black pigs fed below, and the rosy-white clouds of blossom bloomed above—a strange contrast you shall see any day in that country.

Then Blyth taught Joy the delights of birds'-nesting. What unspeakable happiness she felt on finding first a thrush's nest, all by herself! It was on the banks of the Chad, where she was wandering while Blyth sailed sticks, which he called ships, down the stream. Joy perceived something blue a little way below her feet, and there it was just above the water's flow, built so that the overhanging edge of the turf slightly sheltered it. Joy fell on her knees, and fairly screamed in her ecstasy, which brought Blyth, running. He admired it too; although giving his opinion that it was a foolish spot to choose, and they must be a young couple of birds that built it.

This did not prevent Joy from dreaming all night of her mud-lined treasure, with its four azure-speckled beauties of eggs, as the loveliest ever seen. Alas! when, next morning, she hurried to the beloved spot, the nest was gone.

There had been a freshet in the night and a brown, turbid flood now rushed along, filling the river-bed to its brink. Blyth was right. But he did not triumph over her. He only said, "I thought Chad came down last night; I heard the cry of the river as I lay awake."

And next came the first time in her life that Joy heard a strange call of "Cuck-oo, Cuck-oo!" and stood turning her head in puzzled amazement toward the oak-copse on either side. Blyth at once made her lift her small left foot, and showed how to search its imprint on the ground carefully for a hair. This, the boy explained, would be in its color the same as that of her future husband. He found a small hair triumphantly after diligent search and mutual poking of their fingers. It was of a dusky red, much like that of any of the calves, Joy thought (they were in the paddock behind the cowhouse), but Blyth announced it was just the same as his own yellow locks, so the little maid, with beautiful faith piously believed him.

Year after year, they two sought new birds' nests, heard returning mysterious cuckoos, and were happy. If once Joy, grown older and less trustful, found a white hair under her foot, and again none, which somewhat shook her belief in Blyth's mutual magic, still he unfailingly produced a jetty one that by no conceivable chance could belong to any one but herself. Farmer Berrington was once shown this wonder, and asked with mysteriousness, where did *he* think it had come from, to which he answered, not knowing, "Why! off a black pig, I say."

When told with eager horror of his mistake, how he had roared

with silent laughter, till his face grew purple, and his capacious sides ached.

Yes; the long years after years that Rachel, up at the cottage, had somewhat sadly foreseen for herself and her companion, strange, silent sisters both, passed over merrily for little Joy and the bigger Blyth. Winter snows were piled on summers' graves; these were in turn thawed by the lusty warmth and quickening influences of new young years. Meanwhile both children grew bigger and stronger; rosy, if tanned by the warm suns and moorland breezes; healthy and hardy, though somewhat wild, according to prim notions of up-bringing.

Blyth had been given his pony the winter after Joy came, and daily rode to Moortown grammar-school, the few hours of separation only making both of them more happy to see each other again. For, though the boy was glad to have comrades now of his own age and kind, he never flinched in affection to his little pet plaything. She would wait for him down the lane every afternoon, till he came in sight. Then he would lift her on his pony and walk by her side to the farm-gate, where Farmer Berrington often chanced to be also silently waiting. It was a pretty sight.

Hannah, for her part, felt as if she had at last come to a land of Goshen; and was happy among the strangers, and only hoped to live on there in peace now—peace was always her inner cry—and to wander no more. By degrees she had taken up the duties of house-keeper at the Red House, being the most capable and experienced woman therein; and her soul at last was thoroughly content.

“But I'll not meddle with the butter: for it's clean against the principles in which I was brought up as a young girl to use a tub for a churn and turn my hand to be a churn-stick,” she had said. She had loved putting the fresh milk into a vast churn and hearing the dash of the dipper, while afterward there was no drink like fresh buttermilk or evening meal like supping sowens, to her mind. Still, with all her prejudices, Hannah could not resist overseeing the big pans of Devonshire cream mantling and wrinkling as they were scalded on the hot hearth, or having a sharp eye on the pounds of golden butter sent to Moortown market. Also she loved the big dishes of junket rarely, and soon learned to make them as to the manner born. Then no one could turn out a more excellent weekly batch of loaves, or had a lighter hand with the pastry of the big pies, or knew so many kinds of hot cakes, the secret art of which she had learned in the land of her birth. Thus, what with spring and autumn great house-cleanings and weekly scrubblings and scourings, preserving, pickling, mending napery, seeing to all the washing and the poultry of all kinds, and calves, and sighing over Blyth's torn jacket and Joy's new frocks, tatters of which adorned all the bushes within miles, besides knitting for all the household, Hannah verily had her hands full. Her northern energy astonished the easy-going, rather lazy, gentle people around her.

Little Joy, however, was the life and light of the Red House. She had fairly nestled herself into the innermost core of Berrington's big heart. Though he grew more taciturn, as he also became broader and redder, every year, yet he seldom failed to have a full-moon

smile to greet her; and would always unlock his lips to say slowly, "Well, my little sunbeam." Joy was alike his plague and darling.

By and by Joy too trotted down the lane with her satchel to a dame's school, and the quiet that ensued in the farmhouse for two hours was "amazin'," said Berrington. He quite missed her footstep following him round the fields and farmyard in the mornings; but the sisters up in the glen had willed it so.

At first, Miss Rachel had hoped they might themselves have taught the child, but the experiment failed in three days. Magdalen frightened little Joy by her impatience and occasional outbreaks of anger during the lessons, as well as by her equally capricious fits of passionate affection. Her light, bright nature, that had itself flashes of wayward genius, could not endure the slow unfolding of the young, immature brain. Then, if for once the child sat on the floor, with her feet stretched before her (almost unnaturally quiet, Rachel thought, for she was generally like the trickiest spirit of mirth and mischief imaginable), Magdalen would break into a tiff at finding she was, after all, only watching a black beetle crawling, or studying with interested big eyes the antics of the queer-looking crickets that came out on the hearth.

On this Joy would rush passionately to Rachel's knee for protection, who was always so sweet, so tender; the child herself being as violent in her emotions as her mother, but with, already, the promise of a far deeper feeling, and stronger understanding. The scenes of jealousy that ensued were painful and hurtful. From the last one the child escaped unnoticed for the moment, and, young as she was, ran back toward the farm as fast as her small legs could carry her, meeting Hannah half-way, who had come to fetch her, and was scandalized.

Then Rachel sorrowfully saw that the young spirit would only look on them as its task-mistresses and tormentors, or else bring disunion between herself and the poor suffering sister she loved as her own life. So it ceased.

At times there would be a little feast spread on the bare cottage table, of bilberries, with tea, or perhaps some delicacy of short-cake smuggled by Hannah for that purpose into the basket left on certain days at the Logan-stone. Then Joy would come with her nurse, learning by the latter's admonitions as she grew yearly older to dissemble her affection for "Miss Rachel" and pretend more toward "Miss Magdalen;" and at such times Magdalen, being pleased, could take a rare winning manner, so seductive, so strangely fascinating (though capricious), that she did really charm the child for brief happy spaces. Then Hannah's love for the mistress, who was always young to her, returned in full admiring flow; and Rachel, whose love never wavered through good or evil times, smiled, glad to see the black cloud lifted from the being dearest to her.

But still often little Joy tired. The brown cottage was so still, the hooded sisters so weird; her young mind quickly pined for Blyth, who was never allowed to come thither, and for the many delights of the Red House.

Ah, no one knew, and Joy least, how those short visits were as sunbursts in the chill life of the tall, dark woman at Cold-home. No one guessed, when at rare times she met the child alone—by

mere accident, it seemed—and would hug her to her heart with wet, deep eyes, that she had been waylaying its path in fear of offending her other beloved one up yonder in the glen.

And how often—how often, when the opportunity came, the poor hungry soul was disappointed, and had to go back to the terrible stillness of the glen, and to the mean little brown cottage, disappointed, and furtively wiping away the tears that fell thick and fast under her hood.

“Oh, Joy—little Juanita, if I had been your mother nothing should have parted us, my child, my child!” she thought. After all, however strong, she was only a woman, with woman’s longings, and capacities, and little heartaches. Then Rachel would cross her threshold wearily as the shades of night fell, and light the old lantern. Its rays shone in the darkness over the ford where so few travelers came. The lone light seemed like an emblem of her life—wasted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Call me no more,
As heretofore,
The musick of a Feast;
Since now, alas,
The mirth that was
In me, is dead or ceast.

“But Time, Ai me,
Has laid, I see.
My Organ fast asleep;
And turned my voice
Into the noise
Of those that sit and weep.”

HERRICK.

ON Saturday half-holidays, which were among their happiest days, Blyth used to take Joy long, rambling excursions over the moors, or up the hills to explore the rocky fastness of some tor.

One day when Joy was about nine years old, and Blyth some four years more, they amused themselves by tracking the Chad down from its spring three miles away, up among the dwarfed mountain ashes, and the heather and rocks. And thus, following the stream, they had presently found themselves where the waterfall leaped down white into the green darkness of the narrow glen, here almost a chasm or rift, where hardly a ray of sun ever found its way. In general, both boy and girl avoided the neighborhood of the cottage by mute consent; for laughter and play died away as if banned at sight of the lone brown cottage and the dark-hooded women. But this day they had vowed to follow the river all the way down its bed, without flinching from obstacles, till they reached the Red House Farm. To their childish imaginations, to draw back now would have implied loss of honor; so, promising themselves to steal past Cold-home with hushed footfall and bated breath, they plunged with daring recklessness down the steep cliff-side, where the noise of falling water roared in their ears, and the green, gloomy shade of the trees that filled the chasm grew darker and denser, while their foothold became more difficult every minute; but safety lay seventy feet below them, for they could not climb up again!

It was a very difficult descent—so difficult that none but themselves, or the badgers, leaving their holes to feed at night and returning at dawn, and perhaps an occasional fox, ever had tried it.

The sides of the glen were indeed as dangerous all the way, to its mouth. Therefore, as none of the superstitious country-folk or moor-men cared to pass the lone cottage of the wisht* sisters, as they now called Rachel and Magdalen (fearing the evil eye or some unknown harm), the glen was as much the undisturbed retreat of the latter as if it were a little park in their own demesne.

"Oh! Blyth, help me. I *can't* get down!" cried Joy, in dismay, hanging by one arm to a slender oak-tree, whose roots seemed riven in a mass of rock that hung for a few feet sheer below her, while on either side was only a fearful tangle of brushwood, bramble, and no foothold to speak of.

"I'm coming," gasped Blyth, rather breathless himself.

But before he could come, Joy had loosed her hold, and somehow dropped on a ledge a little below, being as lithe as a wildcat.

"Why, there you are!" grumbled the boy. "First you say you can't do it, and then you go and *do* it. That's just like a woman."

What did he know of women? That was spoken like an embryo man. Joy, who was breathless too, shook back her dark curls, her cheeks being flushed like a damask rose, and held out her small brown hands, that were cruelly rasped by the oak bark, before his face.

"But I'm frightened now, Blyth. Help me; I'm so tired, too."

"Why, it's as easy as easy, *now*," jeered Blyth, jumping down lesser big bowlders and holding up his arms to help the little girl, who slid after him. "But that's you always, Joy. When there is any real danger, you're a dare-devil; Dick said so only yesterday. Why, my heart was jumping up and down inside me when you were hanging over that big rock; you might have broken your neck. And now here at these little hop-o'-my-thumb places, you ask for help."

Joy only looked at the gruff young Saxon, with laughing, sweet, black eyes. She was as fearless and self-reliant as any wood-nymph, following this mad sylvan adventure with a faun; but as caressing and full of wiles, too, as the earthliest of little Delilahs. In this lay her charm. So she only clasped Blyth's hand tighter in silence, until, hot, exhausted, and with large rents in their clothes, both found themselves at last at the foot of the waterfall that here sunk, with final white hiss and ceaseless rush, into a deep, dark pool.

"Show me those poor little hands of yours now, and I'll wash them," said Blyth, kneeling on the edge of the rock-basin; and, though his words were curt, schoolboy-like, his action was tender as his heart was soft.

"How strange it is here: how dark and wild! Do you think any persons have ever been here before ourselves?" murmured Joy, shrinking close to his side and looking timidly around, her more fervid imagination, of Southern root and tropical birth-influences, impressed, as was not Blyth's steady, sterner nature.

The glen was dark. On either side the trees almost met across

* *Wisht* means weird or uncanny, in those parts.

the high cliffs; while here and there crannies, among rocks and bushes, looked black as midnight caverns, even by day. In front, the foaming white water came billowing down, leap upon leap, from a far, narrow streak of light up there among the foliage, which alone told of upper world, air, and freedom on the moors.

The waterfall's spray wet the children's heads as they knelt; the rocks were slippery under them. Long fringes of ferns hung thick and moist along the walls of rock. Long water-grasses waved in the hurrying water, with sinuous motion, like the feelers of some half-animal plant. There was hardly a sound, little air, in this cool, green obscurity, where tradition said the sun never shone down but for one midday hour on one day in the year. And what that day is, no man knoweth.

The children rose, and wandered further along by the stream's side. Here the glen began to widen: the light to break down. Presently, the banks on either side became little open glades, with a greensward as old as fairy days, though only the rabbits kept it so short and sweet now, and pattered over it on summer nights. Bosky underwood was dotted here and there; hawthorn-trees, so old, gray-bearded with lichen, and stunted, they might have seen Merlin, stood in clumps, rejoicing in fresh leafage. For it was the time of spring, and all the woodland sides of the dell, and every nook and cranny, too, were bursting out in tender green, while golden primroses made libations in treasure spots of happy brightness, or shone elsewhere in scattered stars, like

“Fancies that frolick it o'er the earth.”

Tender bluebells hung on their hollow stalks in the thickets, gleaming azure in shy company. There was a twittering and singing everywhere to be heard from branch and brake in this sweet, secluded hollow, where no rough winds came down or disturbing foot of man trod. This narrow moorland rift, rather than glen, was like a little bit of Eden on this spring evening, here where it rejoiced in the kindly warmth of sunlight, God's chiefest blessing on earth; the birds hopped about more fearlessly than elsewhere, and the rabbits, scuttling with jerking white tails, sat up and gazed curiously at the children, thinking, each and all, it seemed, “We know Magdalen, we love Rachel, but who are you?”

“What is that?” both Blyth and Joy had exclaimed simultaneously, as a strain of strange music faintly reached their ears. They paused, looked at each other, wondering in hushed murmurs what this might mean; then hand-in-hand the boy and girl stole on together, keeping behind the shelter of the bushes as they approached the elfin sound. It was delicate music, played on strings, for certain; as now and then the air seemed picked out with a slightly twanging sound, then by fits and starts the hand would be swept up and down with a rush and a wild shake or two, and then again it would strike the instrument with a deep sound that intensified the bass, like the drum in a band of shrill light pipings.

Holding their very breath with exquisite delight, for such music had never been known in all the country round about, they parted the bushes and peered through.

In the sunniest little open of all, Magdalen sat on the river's bank.

Her hood was thrown back, her dress was loosened at the throat, and her sleeves were rolled up as if to show the rounded whiteness of her arms.

She had placed a fantastic garland of bluebells and ferns on her fair hair, and bunches of starry primroses in her bosom; and so, believing herself secure from all eyesight, bent over now and then to see her dark reflection mirrored in a still, clear pool below, as well as might be. Sometimes she would wave her arms and raise them in graceful attitudes, admiring the outline as she gazed. Then she would snatch up a guitar in her lap, and, playing it with fitful passion, draw forth the sweet, maniac music that had intralled the children's ears, now wailing, sobbing, or in plaintive murmurs; again madly merry, like a gypsy's carousal song, sung to the sound of castanets and tambourine—a snatch, no more, for too soon the broken, doubting chords began again.

But hark! some memory of an air crossed her distracted mood, for she raised her head, played a prelude with a light laugh and lingering fingers; once more, with growing passion and a wilder, more rapid, yet assured touch. Then, looking up to the sky and woods for inspiration and audience, she began to sing,

“Taza be taza,
No be no.”

It was the famous Gazel of Hafiz, familiar to all nautch-girls in India who have sung and danced to “Mutriba Khush, his sweetest song,” so the words begin, perhaps since ever the poet's lips first uttered them, five hundred years ago.

The listeners still listened, entranced, after the last notes had died away. But then—

Up sprung Magdalen, flung down her guitar, and, as if intoxicated with the praise and applause of an unseen audience, she smiled in ecstasy, bowed to all sides, pressed her flowers to her heart with a pretty gesture of deprecation yet triumph. Then, daintily holding out her skirts with her finger-tips, began to dance on the short green turf. First she moved airily, with measured steps, courtesying, crossing, taking hands in graceful windings and turnings with imaginary partners, at whom she threw coquettishly bright or languishing glances, poor soul! But soon, possessed by her own music, that had mounted to her brain, her feet moved faster and faster, as if impatient, till presently she was dancing in a maddened whirl, with flying steps that beat their own time, on the greensward. Round and round, with upraised arms, Magdalen, with heaving breast and hair now fallen down in loose, disordered light masses, still, like a mænad, went on, on, on! in that wild dance; with many circlings and wavings, and frenzied, yet always instinctively graceful, alluring gestures, till the brains of the children grew giddy as they watched from their ambush.

One last convulsive whirl; then her muscles flagged, and, with laboring breath, the dancer suddenly stopped short. She gave a cry, threw up her arms to the heavens above as in appeal, then hid her face in her hands, and sinking slowly, exhausted, on the ground, stretched herself there, with her head buried in the grass.

She had remembered, by a flash of returned reason, where and what

she was. The boy and girl watching knew it; no human soul would have failed to understand the despair of that last pitiful gesture. They shrunk back, awed by their young, intense pity for this disordered intellect, and the mystery and horror of why such suffering should be. Then both shivered, as low moans came from that prostrate form, those of a soul in agony. The moans grew quicker, sharper; then followed a storm of sobs, blinding weeping, choking cries upon cries.

The woman lying there knew herself at that moment, still young, passionate, with her life wasted, her brain wrecked by the cruelty of man; and, "God had permitted it!" No hope, none, in the days stretching barren before her; but the dreadful certainty instead of more black tunnels of time, down which her spirit must wander, groping and weeping for light and company, or else tasting a fearful, delirious joy, to be afterward bitterly scorned, like that from which she had just awakened. And still her cries echoed from the cliff-sides of the lonely glen, and rang up to the still blue strip of sky overhead, through which no angel-faces could be seen looking down in pitying consolation. They pierced the ears and wrung the hearts of the children, who felt weak to the marrow of their bones, hearing them.

These dreadful cries against man; to God against God! Would they never cease? Frightened and heartsick, the boy and girl stole away down the glen; Blyth quite pale, and tears washing down Joy's cheeks. Neither had believed grown persons could be so miserable. Long after they had left the glen those shrieks still seemed to haunt their ears, and they would stop and listen to any faint sounds borne on the breeze. They only breathed freely—both with a great sigh of relief—when they saw the cheerful Red House Farm windows.

CHAPTER XIX.

"The bairnies they were talking,
And we listened to what they'd say;
Says one: 'I saw a strange thing,
As I played in the wood one day.
I saw—and I saw—' so it chattered on,
And all wondered in innocent strife;
But we looked at each other, pale to the lips—
'Twas the secret of a life!"

BLYTH held his peace about the late scene in the glen, when both children returned to the farm. But little Joy, who was strangely pale and silent all evening, could not refrain from mysterious answers when Hannah made affectionate and solicitous inquiries of her. And so the matter was told to Berrington.

He spoke to both of the children seriously that night, explaining the horrors which even the most harmless poor souls, who suffered from occasional dark periods of obscured reason, had endured in asylums; so he and his neighbors and their fathers had heard tell. Of being chained to a wall, half naked, half starved, with less straw than a dog for miserable bedding; of indignities; of broken limbs and ribs; and the last glimmer of intellect suffocated, till Joy trembled and wept, suddenly stirred, poor child, by a storm of pas-

sionate emotion, inexplicable to herself. At which Blyth, watching her, felt moved too, in an inward way; so that he was half ashamed of himself, though with little cause for that either.

Then the farmer lifted his pet on his knee, and consoled her. Nay, there was no cause for such fears. While he lived, no one should hurt a hair of the heads of those poor women-souls up the valley; and afterward, please God, he could trust his boy to guard them. Which Blyth, in his heart, there and then swore to do; outwardly he nodded. So Joy, who had hidden her face in his old velvet coat, listened to Berrington—her sobs lessening—who hinted how she herself, ay, and Blyth, too, in future, might help Miss Rachel in her good and great work. Especially he bade her, however, be careful, now she was growing such a mortal big girl, to hold her peace on this matter, which Joy solemnly promised.

"And Blyth," eager for her comrade to be sworn likewise; "why don't you tell him to be silent, too?"

"He is a boy; it matters more to thee," said Berrington, oracularly.

So both children forbore to speak of what they had learned, except to each other.

"So that is why Miss Rachel and Miss Magdalen live always alone. Have you not often thought, Blyth—no, *felt*, their lives were strange? And this is their secret," whispered Joy, in an awed voice, as she and Blyth sat on a branch of their favorite old pear-tree, on high among the white blossoms, dangling their legs.

Blyth nodded, and said, slowly,

"I suppose so."

He had a way of being curt and oracular now, at times, like his father, which Joy found provoking, even unfair, when wishing to open her heart in a full disburdening, and, of course, interchange of confidences. Joy was so quick in appreciation, she was almost Blyth's companion in intelligence; for girls

"Grow upon the sunny side o' the wall,"

and ripen soonest. Still, Blyth was four years older, and could recall many wondering comments and guesses in scraps of talk between Dick and the shepherds, when the child first came to the farm. That she bore his mother's name of Haythorn signified little; for once, when he had asked if Joy was his cousin, his father had told him no, with a kindly admonition not to talk or trouble his own head yet on the subject. Blyth, too, believed in the scapegrace father invented for the child by the gossips, the more so as his father, he noticed, had never contradicted any chance allusions thereto, while Hannah's portentous sighs were as so many blasts of affirmation. But he knew, of course, and often wondered over, Joy's visits to Cold-home, and puzzled himself much thereat. These visits were kept as carefully secret as could well be by Hannah from the few farm-laborers and the maids. Otherwise, what with the child's swarthy looks, not unlike Rachel herself, Berrington might not have escaped the gossiping tongues of the poorer village-folk, who talked, often with cruel candor, of all the doings of their employers round the fagot-fires at night.

Country gossip is perhaps the worst gossip there is; for open-air

life, while it keeps most who live far apart from each other innocent and kindly as dwellers in solitary tents, tends to make some brutish in thought, too, as their own herds of peaceful cows and silly sheep. So, when the poorer of this last said kind of out-of-door-living folk swarm together in little villages at night and talk, little do they heed of the complex motives, the small ambitions, and more refined pleasures familiar, perhaps, to even as mean dwellers in cities. All is good or bad to them; what they do not understand they attribute to the blackest causes, and that without much malice, knowing no better. They feel so simply but strongly, and while told they have a divine spark within them, know themselves so earthly.

Blyth solemnly believed Joy knew nothing of these surmises. But she was very sharp to hear and note, and could keep her thoughts secret, too. Also, he supposed, feeling as grave as a young owl, she guessed nothing now of what was in his heart as they sat among the branches. Did she not, though; a something? For thought strangely communicates with thought, especially among those who live together and are in sympathy. And the little maid's face grew grave, too.

CHAPTER XX.

"Weep not, my wanton—smile upon my knee;
When thou art old, there's grief enough for thee."

GREENE.

"Thou little child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke?"

WORDSWORTH.

NEXT day Rachel Estonia had gone forth alone toward the village where Joy went to school, hoping to have her eyes blessed by sight of the child; her chances for doing so had been so rare of late. More bold than usual, because feeling heart-starved for lack of love, she adventured herself down the steep lane leading to the village, which lay in a shadowy coombe.

The banks that rose on either side were nearly thirty feet high, and so steep and tangled with holly, brier, and a wildly luxuriant growth of flowering bushes and creepers, that any escape up them from the curious gaze of peering villagers was impossible. Still, the men were at work in the fields; the women were, or should have been, at their household labors, for it was three of the afternoon.

Rachel went slowly, therefore, down the narrow stony road, followed by so many winter rains, and generations of travelers wending from the wooded rich valleys below or the wilder moors above.

She feasted her eyes with artistic appreciation of beauty on the banks on either side; the lichen out-cropping rocks, or rain-slips exposing red soil, the waving fringes and banners of ferns and briony, the glory of broom, growing far up, and red campion and bluebells mingling in startling contrast; the proud hollies, like a serried rank of soldiers, meeting the sharp wind of winter highest aloft of all, and giving its name of Holme Coombe to the dingle. By the roadside, a crystal streamlet hurried from the hills above. In winter it

often poured over the road, making the lane dangerous in times of frost. But now it only sung and tumbled in its stony channel, till, reaching the village below, it poured so clean and swift through the old moor-stone runnel down the street that the gossiping housewives all washed their potatoes therein before cooking-time. Rachel could see the village lying deep below her now, as she gazed down a bend of the road.

The thatched cottages straggled picturesquely in the valley among apple-trees, their cob walls of mud and pebbles leaning at all angles, and washed either white, buff, or a favorite warm pink. Noisy children, hens, ducks, and domestic animals scrambled and swarmed about the doors, with cheerful noises that came up the hill. How untidy, yet clean and happy, the village looked to Rachel's dark eyes as she gazed. It did her good to see other human homes even from afar; and she thought, with a pang, of their own bare, silent cottage, whose brown cob walls, the better to escape observation, were never washed of any cheerful color; and where the child, their one joy, only came at times. What a contrast!

But where *was* Joy? Some other children who lived on an upland farm, too, came tripping by, hushing their chatter and stealing curious glances as they passed Rachel. "Have I the evil eye, do they think?" she sighed to herself, and went on depressed, with slow, hesitating steps. She would so gladly have blessed their sunny heads and clear eyes. The lane turned sharply round some high rocks now, behind which Rachel heard a little voice singing, or, rather, trying to sing. She listened, then crept nearer—

"Taza be taza,
No be no!"

sung the little voice again and again, like a young bird repeating the first parent-notes it can mimic.

There was an ancient stone cross raised on two worn steps at one side of the hollow lane, and little Joy was sitting at its foot, swinging her sun-bonnet and humming with a defiant air to herself.

"Who taught you to sing that, dear?" The child started, and looking up saw Rachel's deep eyes bent upon her. She gave one quick, frightened glance round, then, seeing no Magdalen near, was reassured. Rachel's look had a light to her, like love shining through darkness. At first she did not answer, but as the gentle woman sat down beside her, drawing the small form caressingly to her side, Joy nestled closer of her own accord; and presently a few questions elicited all.

"And so you want to sing, and to play the guitar?" said Rachel, dreamily.

"Yes, yes: teach me! The other children at school can't do that, if they do laugh at me and ask questions—why I have no father or mother?" cried the little girl, passionately.

"*What?*" said Rachel, breathing the question low, as if much moved. "Do they ask you about that, Joy? Tell me, dear. Yes, I must know; this is important."

Joy's face flushed a deep, hot red; but she turned it in sudden impulse up to the speaker, who now noticed recent tear-stains upon her cheeks.

"They do. That is why I would not go back with them to-day; I pretended not to care, and sat here, but— Oh! tell me, why does no one speak to me of my mother? I have asked Hannah about my father, and she said he was a wicked and cruel man, but that he would trouble us no more; so I suppose he is dead. But she never says that of my mother. She only sighs and says she wishes I may only grow up worthy of her, but that I must ask no questions."

"Wicked and cruel," repeated Rachel, murmuring to herself, while a spasm she could not control crossed her features, the outcome of a sharp pain in her soul, and her lips were dry as she went on, huskily, "Child, child, you must not judge your father. He may have been all that, and yet—and yet— Oh! how can we tell? *Perhaps he never knew!* never meant to work such evil. What can a child of your age, what can even women, guess of a man's temptations and trials? Never speak of it, Joy, never think of him—unless in your prayers; yes, yes; pray, pray hard that he may be forgiven."

"Then he is not dead?" said the child, slowly.

"We do not know—no one does. He was alive, we heard, two years ago, but then we lost all news of him: dead to us, at least."

"To us," repeated little Joy, whose lustrous dark eyeballs were fixed with the gently merciful scrutiny of her innocent age full on her companion, whose emotion she perceived; while a dawning thought gave a strange, slow tone of happiness to her voice as she added, "You liked him, did you not? I know that, because your face looks so sorry, as if you wanted to cry. But why don't you tell me of *her*?"

Rachel started back, pierced to the heart, yet powerless before the child's words; looking at her with hopeless, miserable eyes, as if found guilty of a deadly sin, done, nevertheless, without her own knowledge.

But Joy did not see, did not wait. The child of impulse, she was carried away by a hungry orphan's craving, and the irresistible idea of solving the mystery of her own birth to her own delight. Next instant she had thrown her arms round Rachel's neck in a soft, clinging embrace. She pressed close to that loving breast, and while her child's face, with longing, lustrous eyes, like brown jewels set therein, was upturned to that above her in a transport of affection and expectancy, she asked low,

"*Are you my mother?*"

"No," said Rachel. She could utter no more.

The little girl loosened her clasp, but hid her face silently in her elder's neck, whose arms now enfolded her. Violent sobs shook Joy's childish frame, in the bitterness of this great disappointment. What Rachel, bending over her, meanwhile thought, who can guess? But she consoled the hurt young soul with murmurs, with caresses, and the unheard, unseen atmosphere of love that surrounded her darling, exhaled from her own spirit, and that was surely perceived as by a sixth sense, for presently the first outburst of grief lessened in force.

"I do not know—I did not think, oh, for ever so long! there was some secret about who I was," said the poor child, brokenly, by and by.

Ever so long meant, after all, some months—she was so young. Then Joy continued, feeling herself unable to speak the chief words, “But I thought to-day you were—because you love me so much, and I love you more than anybody.”

“Dear, dearest child,” murmured the woman beside her, perplexed with conflicting feelings that stirred even her deep, strong spirit, like the ground-swell of an ocean. “But still I trust you do not, you ought not, to love me more than my sister, than—than Magdalen.”

“If I had never seen you, I might have cared more for her; but, as it is, I love you far the best,” declared Joy, in a clear, decided voice, of which there was no mistaking the fully meant intensity of feeling.

Rachel shuddered. Did the child’s words remind her of some similarly spoken by another voice? words she had rued her life long, yet that could never be wiped out of her memory with bitterest penitential tears. For her heart, innocent in happiness then, had received their impress too deeply.

“Joy, never say that to me again,” she uttered, in intensity of emotion, hardly knowing what she said. “It is not right. You must love her best.” The child looked up, and this time, as their eyes met in a long, unconsciously sorrowful gaze, they understood each other.

“Ah!” said Joy.

She knew now.

Rachel was frightened. The young creature’s face turned of quite a swarthy red, while the veins of her forehead swelled to suffocating painfulness. Then the blood ebbed back to Joy’s heart as suddenly, leaving her face pallid, and her short upper lip quivering.

“Is *she* often like that—like what she was—? Oh! we saw her in the glen the other day, so strange and wild. I cannot bear to remember it,” she whispered, with faint utterance.

Rachel bathed the child’s forehead with water, dipping her handkerchief in the cold stream by the roadside.

“No, no; not often—you should never have seen that. Poor child, you are too young to understand. We wished to shield you from the knowledge. Think how greatly I love her, sweet; how lovable she is; how graceful! You must love her as I do.”

Presently she led the little maid homeward, still silent, still pallid, and clinging to her side very closely, unable yet to throw off the shock. It was growing toward four o’clock, as Rachel knew, with a pang: and tea-time, as all such times and seasons, must be kept by herself and the child for others’ sake, whatever storms of secret emotion had shaken their souls.

Leaving the lane, they clambered up the side of the bank to the upper fields. Here, in a wood of young larch-trees, thickly carpeted with pale wind-flowers and purple violets, Rachel rested on a tree-stump. Joy crept to lean against her aunt’s knees, feeling weak and childish, poor young soul, by contrast with her late momentary exultation in flight after a fancied hope. Picking a white star-flower, after some grave moments, Rachel showed it to the child. Her fingers had chosen the only withered, broken one among its satin-petaled sisters.

"See, dear; it is olighted by sun and wind, by no fault of its own. Does it not deserve more pity, more love than these other snowy, happy flowers? It is like your mother, Joy; will you not try to love her best? Think how she has suffered."

"I will—I will!" cried the child, sitting up straight, and uttering her promise with a vehement accent, looking away from Rachel as she spoke.

Rachel's lips smiled to herself. Why do lips smile in bitterness of soul? She knew Joy would keep her word—at least, strive her best. A sort of shame in having wrongly guessed her own mother, revulsion of feeling, and a passionate loyalty to the woman hitherto unknown, that had borne her, and toward whom the child's heart had been vainly seeking, like a disturbed needle quivering wildly till it can point truly to its pole—all, all would, must, eject herself, Rachel, from the chief place in this young heart, where hitherto she had been dearest. And, *oh, merciful heavens! she loved this child so.* Her heart swelled big with bitterness, felt even such pangs of anguish as if she were renouncing the rightful love of her own offspring. But she must, she would, abandon her secret claims on this dear, white soul, bravely, yea, and cheerfully.

"Why does God let my mother be mad?" said the childish lips beside her, with dreary intonation, and the first sad sigh Joy had perhaps ever yet uttered.

Rachel looked hastily round. What, would her own mind-troubles be reproduced here—the battle of doubt against faith through which she had struggled, weary and wounded, to difficult victory? must it be fought again, and in one so young?

"Dear Joy! You believe that God is good, though?" she said, with solemn reverence, as if the wood were holy ground where she spoke to this young soul of its Maker.

"Of course he is quite good—I know *that*," retorted Joy, looking at the sky with big eyes, and an expression of face and voice as if she would as soon have doubted the evidences of her senses that the sun shone up there now; then she added, naïvely, "But how bad the devil must be!"

Rachel did not dispute this idea. She was intensely relieved. To herself—a large-brained woman, having both culture and intellect—this devout belief in the devil's personality was not absolutely necessary to salvation; but to a young mind, that might have grown hopelessly puzzled over the origin of evil, it was perhaps the best solving of such problems. Her pretty Joy had inherited the Spanish woman's cast of mind, she now supposed to herself—intensely loving, utterly believing; love, indeed, blending with religion and faith, if no evidence of powers of mind, yet sweetly supporting life's burdens.

"Yes, women with such faith are the happiest," she mused. "Be their deeds never so foolish, their sins shall be forgiven them, for they love much."

She, like many more, was inclined to think that greater wisdom than their sisters brought small gladness to women. What had it availed herself? of what use her own intellect, learning, brilliance, of which her dear father had been so proud, when with admiring friends—himself a man of mark among giants of mind? Buried,

seemingly, among these moors. Yet, who knows? naught is wasted in the universe! The clouds that have absorbed the earth's moisture return it in rain; the sunlight, hid deep for ages in coal-mines, flashes forth at last again in firelight flame.

Some day, some when, some where, in what other life who can say? her dormant powers too, with patience added, might know again the joy of action.

"Pray for me, little Joy—pray *for us* when you go to church next Sunday," she said.

"I will," answered the little girl. "But why do you not come to church with us too?"

"You do not see me," said Rachel, gently; "but still I am there." Then she rose up, and they went their homeward ways, the woman to her poor bare cottage, the child to the pleasant farm.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Sundays the pillars are,
On which heaven's palace arched lies.
The other days fill up the spare
And hollow room with vanities,
They are the fruitful beds of borders
In God's rich garden; that is bare
Which parts their ranks and orders."

G. HERBERT.

THE little church on the moor stood all alone. It was so old, thought the country-folk, that when it was built, or by whom, none knew any more than what pagan men reared the circles, and mysterious stone avenues leading to the rivers, still standing thereabouts on the furzy moors. A hillside rose steep behind the old church. A wood screened it in front, dark and thick, even in winter, because of its many aged yew-trees. In troublous days, when Roundheads and Church-spoilers had gone sacking through the richer lowlands, they had never come up hither to break the small window of colored glass in which the Virgin smiled, or to deface its few rude carvings. Quite alone it stood, but fairly placed between the few farmhouses, some miles away on this side, and as many more on that. Two paths diverged through the wood from the porch, going opposite ways; a third mere track wandered down from the hill and was used by the few moor folk, and as often by the sheep that came in the week-days of silence and desertion to nibble round the gray, lone headstones, where the turf rose in old, old waves, and to lie on the steps of this simple moor-stone hermitage in the wilderness; whence the hermit seemed dead or fled. They, mindful of Scripture parables, were the congregation; the birds, choristers. Lonely, exquisite situation!

When on Sundays the small bell had ceased to tinkle, however, and when the most belated churchgoers through the wood had long been inside, meekly kneeling on their knees and acknowledging themselves miserable sinners, as had their forefathers for several ages, with the same old wooden roof above them and ancient stone flooring beneath them, then came, last of all, two more figures.

These were Rachel and Magdalen, hooded and wrapped, who had come over the hill-brow, from the lonely moor, unseen by any eye

save that of a wheeling march-harrier overhead. They stole past the thick buttressed walls through which the dim hum of voices in worship sounded, none noticing them because the little leaded windows were so gloomy with ancient greenish glass.

They entered softly into the old decorated porch. It was deep, and on one side of its recess ran a worn stone seat, on which they sat down closely side by side. Their eyes then sought with prayerful awe a small oblong aperture in the stone wall of the body of the church. This was a "*squint*" made in older days for convenience of the attendant or lay-brother, whose duty was to ring the sanctus bell when the sacred host was elevated at the little altar inside there. Where he had once watched, there with far more intensely earnest gaze the sisters worshiped with hearts, ah! so yearning, humbled to the dust, deeply penitent for weekly sins that surely the recording angel smiled at in forgiving pity. Through the said loophole they could see the backs of the honest parishioners at prayer, among them little Joy and Blyth between Farmer Berrington and Hannah. Through a second aperture at exactly the same angle with the first, but this one in an inside pillar beside the old wooden screen, they could see the altar itself. Till the service of intercession and praise was over, they sat with bowed heads and hands clasped. When the sermon began they went silently away. So they had done unknown, unnoticed, for the last several years they had now passed on the moors; so they would always do.

Leaning on each other, they went silently homeward, weeping often in a quiet way; Magdalen finding comfort in such support, Rachel comforted by giving it. On Sundays, they felt their loneliness most of all.

"Sister," Rachel would always say, "let us go in *next* Sunday and pray with the rest."

"No, no; not the next one. Some day, perhaps, but not so soon," Magdalen would reply, as invariably, with an affrighted, yet secret air. "Go in, if you like, but I will stay outside. While I am possessed by an evil spirit, the leper's squint-hole, where they used to look through, people say, is only fit for me. I am an outcast, as they were."

And Rachel, still thinking to herself, "This kind cometh not out save by prayer and fasting," wiped her eyes, and was silent.

* * * * * * *

It was on a Sunday afternoon; and Rachel had first called up her courage to tell her step-sister of Joy's questionings of herself two days ago, and the consequence thereof. She had feared an outbreak, but Magdalen took it quietly, almost lightly.

"I knew it must come to this some day," she said. Strange, shifting creature; one could never count on her ways beforehand.

They were sitting on the hillside among low bushes, but not far they could hear the rush and babble of the hidden river.

"She must go to school," went on Magdalen, decidedly. "When she comes back to the farm in holidays, she will be too eager to enjoy herself to ask questions. And she is too young to be told more than she has found out from you."

Rachel only bent her head gravely in silent assent, but there was thankfulness in her heart for those last words.

"She must go to a good school, to be brought up like a lady, too, for she will not have to herd with the boors in this country all her life, I trust. Why, I might go back into the world any day, if it were only *safe*; Then I should take her into society myself," went on the elder sister, excitedly, seizing the initiative this once, somewhat against their usual custom; for in general she would cry in careless bitterness, or light indolence: What mattered *anything* in such a life as theirs? Pah! a mere vegetable existence, that of plants and bushes. Even the animals had more pleasure; the trees would live longer. But now her eyes sparkled, her cheeks took a flush of youth.

"Yes," she added. "The very idea would make me quite well again, I know; *if only it were safe!* As to the child's schooling, Rachel dear, I hate having to ask you for a penny toward it. But still you like giving to me and her; and when she comes of age, she will be rich, and you shall be paid back everything, interest and all."

Rachel smiled. Would she still be living when Joy came of age? She did not hope it, unless Magdalen still needed her.

"Why should you *hate* to let me give to the child, without thought of payment between us? It is my one pleasure," she said, in her rich, deep voice.

"I know. But, though you pay for her, still the child is *mine*, Rachel. I have lost all I care for—husband, happiness, fortune, and even my own reason at times. But still I will keep my child myself." Magdalen spoke excitedly, trying to seem laughingly affectionate, feeling she took all and gave so little back herself; but a wild glitter in her eye menaced danger.

"You are her mother, so what you say is just," replied Rachel. "Had she not better come and see you, then, dear, to-morrow?"

CHAPTER XXII.

"In la sua volontade è nostra pace."—DANTE.

THE morrow came.

Rachel went out of the little brown cottage, and began walking swiftly toward the hills. She walked as if anxious to leave her thoughts behind her; to get away, away from them under the broad, blue sky, bending in blessed sunshine over the free moors; to be alone among the miles of heather and bog, corrie and crag; away, away, too, from all sound or sight of mankind.

At last she reached her goal, some miles upward among the hills. She sat down wearily at the base of three huge stones forming an ancient cromlech. The shadow of the fourth, the great head-stone, protected her from the heat of the noonday. Behind her from a "clatter" of granite fragments rose what seemed the pillars of a huge temple, hewn in the weather-beaten rock. It was a giant for capping the hill with a solemnity better befitting the vastness and deep loneliness of the scene than the fantastic or grim rock-shapes like crumbled idols of its many brethren around; and therefore Rachel loved it. Those who seek the loneliness of the high hills, either in mind or with the body, are nearest to Nature and to Nature's God. This upland moor, dark-toned now before the flush of

heather came, whose streams ran brown but clear from the bogs in its heart, seemed Nature's sacred ground; the tor above, her temple; the wild creatures of the moor, the birds and beasts, unvexed by man, its attendants.

The one lonely human soul, sitting there, a speck in the landscape, might have been the spirit of a worshiper of that old dead faith, which had reared the cromelech over her head with rude but giant labor.

Alone! alone! Claspings her knees Rachel Estonia sat, gazing far as her eyes could reach at the most distant hills that, veiled in light haze and sunlight, receded to the horizon; their tor-capped heads rising ghostly in the blue distances like earth-spirits turned to stone by enchantment. Then, nearer, she seemed to watch the giant shadows chasing each other across the hills like spirits at vast play; and still she saw them not. The breeze that blew those light clouds overhead, veiling the sun, stirred her dark, heavy masses of hair, but she did not feel it. She sat so still, indeed, that the shy small birds in the bushes near hopped close by her with inquisitive boldness, whin-chats, stone-chats, and finches; and her fine ear might have caught, as often before, the hum of a whole world of insect life, unheeded by most grosser hearing. But she heard nothing; only her body sat there among the rocks. At last she said aloud, "Alone! my heart and I." At that she started. People who live solitary lives speak oftener to themselves than others; still her own voice sounded strange in her ears. It was like the echo of her soul's cry, and intensified the desolateness of the lone woman in the wide heather waste.

She wondered what scene might be passing down in the little brown cottage. Mother and child were drawing together, as she had wished, planned, prayed they might—even though she herself must stand henceforth aloof, not entering into that divine close union, nor tasting the bliss of being nearest and dearest to either. Her great deep heart yearned for love with a fervor undreamed of even by the best of all the natures round her; and it gave in brimming measure; gave, but got not.

She had sacrificed to Magdalen her love, nay! that was duty; but her life, too, the whole offering up of herself, body, soul, and being, till death should them part. And Magdalen, light, fickle, bright creature, loved her as well as she could in her sunshiny movements; at darker times upbraided her in wild bitterness, regretting her lost husband with far intenser love, but hate also in equal violence, and a passionate vehemence that tortured Rachel's soul like glowing irons on the flesh. And Joy, little Joy, was not hers. Even Hannah loved her own mistress best. These three were Rachel's little world.

One other perhaps still lived who had loved her against man's laws, though she, in her innocence, knew it not; against God's laws, too—but *that* he, God-forsaken soul, recked not, knew not, drifting to what dark limbo human knowledge cannot tell—like a storm-cloud borne on the whirlwind of his own passions. She had been a young, white soul, a virgin, with vague Madonna dreams, whom innocent—yes, thank God for that mercy—his passionate love had yet enwrapped as with fire, till her heart became alight, flaming

heavenward in holy thanksgiving joy. It was extinguished suddenly, in blackness and horror, by a sister's threatened curse.

She awoke, and found her love burned out, blasted; herself innocent as ever in thought and deed, but stricken with a deep anguish that had left such traces as, in this world's life, would never be removed. Duty remained: she had followed its stern path to guard, cherish, her unhappy, distracted sister, perhaps dedicating herself—who can say?—with some unspoken, even unthought, feeling still for him whose best-loved that sister should have been.

Yes! he had loved herself best. Rachel remembered it with a fearful joy; then, as a tide of dark crimson suffused her face, she buried her head in her hands, and moaned at the sin of such memory. For years she had fought down the thought. It would have been a relief to have screamed aloud to the grandly desolate rocks overhead, and the wind-hover poised there, a dark bird-blot against the blue, and the wild curlew that flew sadly piping over the wolds. Her pale lips moved now, yet mutely cried in pleading to heaven, "O God, who made me thus, a woman, with woman's nature, capacities, cravings; why am I left so lonely?" Her love shattered, her life ruined! Why was her soul detached, a spark from the Divine All-life, and sent on earth to dree a useless weird. It seemed such waste. Not in lightness of spirit, but in solemn faith, as believing utterly in God's holiness of purpose, yet questioning his ways, as did Job, with the spirit within her he had created to feel what was justice, did Rachel Estonia arraign her Maker with that agonized Why? God seemed nearer to her than others. She, too, as did Moses, could meet with him here in the bush.

Though herself Christianized, Rachel was of pure Jewish parentage. This woman, who could trace her ancestors back to the days when the Lawgiver had led forth the tribes out of Egypt, thought now of their wanderings in the desert, their trials and long penance, as of a story that had a near, almost living interest for herself. The Bible was her chief book in the brown cottage among these moors. Reading it, the ages between seemed to shrivel together, like a mist-wreath, and she herself to be sharing in the life of her tribe; dwelling in the dark tents, in their appointed camping-ground. At times, mystic thoughts flitted through her brain—wonderings whether the old, old tradition of transmigration of souls might not have some truth. She vaguely remembered some hints of that mysterious doctrine held by the wisest and most secret of Eastern sects, as told by one of its priests to her father, his trusted friend. Each spirit lived many human lives, through immense ages, on this present world (at least) he had said; reincarnated, according to no blind chance, but to new circumstances for which their last lives had fitted them. If so, might not she, this new yet self-same being, have perhaps sinned in rebellion with her people in the wilderness; and dying before her years of expiation were accomplished, be now ending their appointed term.

Oh, dread thought! She looked round with eyes dazed by her own fancy and loneliness. Forty years in this wilderness of moors and hills! Oh, far, far worse than the forty years even in the hot, scorching desert; for there her people lived and suffered with all those they loved, and the land of promise lay before them wherein their chil-

dren should go in and dwell with gladness. But she, Rachel! no children's arms might ever cling round her neck, true and tender as would have been her care of them. No wife and mother in Israel was she now, great as would have been her love and deep devotion. Ah! if she had indeed lived and suffered by the waters of Marah, surely the sight of the Shekinah must have comforted her. God's visible presence was a sign unto his people; they *knew* why they were chastised. But Rachel Estonia now did not know. No pillar of smoke rose before her anguished gaze into the unanswering blue of the empyrean; no fire-column glowed across the black moorland wastes in the desolation and darkness of the mirk midnight.

"O God, how have I sinned," she cried in her heart, "that I should have loved a man who was so evil, and that my life is useless and ruined?"

Useless! Even as the word left her lips, she knew it was not so. Useless to have ministered to a mind diseased, through years to have kept the light of a fellow-being's soul from going out during life? Nay, not so. And then, as the sun moved slowly westward, her story was unrolled before her in thought, as so often before. The moors silently seemed to know it. Yonder bright sun-kissed valley, or that peep into the smiling champaign-land below, was like the fair ground which her youth had gone gayly through. Then came the sudden dangerous gorges, the difficult but sun-kissed hills, the awful black chasm behind that distant tor called the Lover's Leap, the morass of deadly ground in midmost moors that no living man durst cross. Lastly, the wide, desolate heath around her now, bleak and bare—but safe. And here follows the story they mapped, the living geography of the life of a lonely soul.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Oh, swallow sister, oh, fleeting swallow,
My heart in me is a molten ember.
And over my head the waves have met;
But thou would'st tarry, or I would follow.
Could I forget or thou remember—
Couldst thou remember and I forget?
Oh, sweet stray sister, oh, shifting swallow,
The heart's division divideth us."

SWINBURNE.

WHAT, then, was Rachel Estonia's story?

It was the old, old tale of the fair swallow and her sister, the nightingale, that beautiful Grecian myth.

The false King Tereus of Thrace had wooed and married Procne, a princess of Attica.

Then deserting her, he sees and loves her deep-hearted sister Philomel—but here the resemblance ends. In the myth he tells the latter that her sister is dead, till, the twain meeting, she learns his treachery. Procne thereupon kills her child, and flies with Philomel from Attica; then being pursued, they pray to the gods, who thereupon change the wife into a swallow Philomel into the mournful nightingale, and Tereus himself into a hawk.

From her earliest childhood, Rachel had looked up to her pretty

step-sister, Magdalen Mendoza, as the bright ideal of all that was most beautiful and winning. A dark, grave child herself, she had not many attachments; but those few were passionately deep, and took such root in her soul they were part of it. Magdalen was just the opposite of a humming-bird nature, that lightly flitted from flower-heart to heart, sipping the honey from each, then darting upward and away, like a flickering sunbeam gone astray. She had been also their mother's favorite; but Rachel shared that mother's worshiping admiration too much to be jealous, and loved her elder sister better than her life.

Their household led a very still existence, though one rich with pleasures of the truest kind—no Dead Sea apples, but golden Hesperidian fruit as befitted the home of a priest of science.

Estonia himself was a great scholar and deep thinker; of most high esteem among his learned brethren, and, what is rarer, so much appreciated and revered therefore in his own household that neither his wife nor child would have disturbed his almost sacred hours by even a louder footfall than usual on the marble floors of their Genoese palace—for then they lived in Italy. Only Magdalen rebelled! She was smiled upon and borne with by all, the patient, great scholar like the rest; it was her nature, they saw. After all, she was their song-bird in that hushed if happy silence. She was like the dancing and glancing of sunlight in their great sunk courtyard-fountain, that was reflected in shifting, hide-and-seek play of brightness on the cool marble walls that were, but for this, shadowed in a pleasant twilight during the hottest blaze of noon.

But when Magdalen grew to feel herself a woman, then—to follow the metaphor a little further—the cage-door being one day set open by chance, their song-bird fled.

She went traveling with her father's relatives; found life suddenly a spring outburst of welcome to the new beauty and also heiress, as she was, in certain Parisian salons, at German watering-places—herself a young goddess. On and on she went, from one round to another of pleasures appropriated to the seasons. Her mother, for that first dead husband's sake, did not like to recall her; perhaps could not.

Willful but charming always, Magdalen had been too indulged from her babyhood to be checked now.

Then they were startled to hear she was married. Her lover was a handsome Spaniard, Da Silva by name, whom her friends had thought an adventurer. But Magdalen, chafed by their opposition, married him in secret; and so, trusting her wayward self and her fortune to the stranger, sailed with him for the southern half of the New World, as we call it, that is so mysteriously old in itself. And then, after a few stray letters—followed—silence!

An utter silence, as of the dead. Whether dead or living, no answer came to the loving, urgent appeals, sent wandering on thinnest of paper through rough journeys across Brazilian plains and forests. They cried to Magdalen, but it was as to a dead wall; no word, no reply came back.

Nearly two years had so passed, during which the Estonias traveled, and Rachel saw many fair and some strange countries, the memories of which were pictures that, in her present hermit exist-

ence, she would often call up with delight, and *see again*—the old Nile flowing softly by Philæ or Luxor; or the dusky daughters of Southern Europe pressing the grapes with wine-stained ankles; or the Acropolis outlined white and severe against the fervent blue sky, a noble stone corpse from which the spirit had long fled. Let no one say, in foolish consolation for not having seen beautiful countries, "Ah, that is a pleasure to come." Once seen, the pleasure is for then and always.

But though mother and daughter thus found enjoyment of eyesight and mind, yet their hearts yearned after their wanderer. She must be dead, they said at last; she could not forget them so, otherwise! So those who love best always think—forgetting that those who *are* loved have many distractions, self-excuses.

Then Estonia died. It was a great bereavement to Rachel and her mother. Still both felt that, as he had loved and cherished them perfectly in this life, so somewhere his strong soul only awaited their coming for all three to be reunited as he had taught them to believe, in nobler, higher tasks for which those of earth might have been the mere alphabet letters.

Both returned to England; and there, after a while, natural human happiness softly conquered sorrow, as the young year's sun the winter's rains. And it was spring-time, the time of all love in nature, when hearts are set wide open to gladness. The nightingales were singing in the south country, and Rachel remembered that always thereafter, her heart aching again at their notes.

Love came to her, too, for the first time. To a woman of her mold, the last and only time. Such are grand-natured women, but not the happiest, unless Fate is very kind and gives them their one heart's desire. She had been living contented as always, but no more, among kindly, prosaic English folk. They were good and she liked them, but felt herself an alien. They admired her (which said much for their overcoming of insular prejudices), but as a strange being they did not understand.

Then came the King Tereus. He appeared like a comet from unknown regions; handsome, of even brilliant if neglected gifts. Rachel crossed his path a moment. He saw and loved her as his better self, with his whole powers of being. No one of even those who blamed him most bitterly ever doubted *that*! She was his ideal of a perfect woman; seeming allied to the better spirit within him he had so often yearned to *be*, of the two fighting for mastery in his strange, dual being. To her he had at least been honest, not telling her he had been a good man, nay, rather the contrary; but that her help, hers only, could redeem him.

It was no lie. He felt himself evil, but longed to be better; so he grasped at a new sin in the vain hope of redeeming the old evil. Adoring Rachel as a white soul high above the fatal descent of Avernus—from the slopes whereof he gazed wistfully upward—he yet would have dragged her down to his side, while thinking her hand could raise him.

Ah!—Rachel was one of the most fair-judging women on earth, most being too partial or prejudiced; and she could understand his conduct, and pity him, while pitying, too, the others in this sorrowful play of life and—herself.

If a fiend in his conduct to her, he was, nevertheless, Lucifer, the fallen son of the morning. She recognized a strong, ambitious nature that could not rest, but must ever strive, strive, for good or ill. Women are like the angels in this, that they will all joy over one sinner that repenteth more than over the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.

So Rachel believed in Gaspard's yearnings for good, as did her mother, who was won, too, by his grace of address and great love for her daughter. And he, unhappy, dark soul, believed also in himself. Looking back afterward, Rachel could never remember one instance of a word or sign that might have revealed to him the fact that Magdalen Mendoza and Rachel Estonia were half-sisters. Nor was this very surprising, for Magdalen had been so much more proud of her own family—allied with the great Spanish Jews—than of her simple and scholarlike step-father, that she had rarely alluded to the latter and her mother before her rash and hasty marriage. After that—finding only too soon her mistake, and that her fortune had been her chief attraction—she entirely ceased from all mention of her own people to her neglectful, perhaps often irritated husband. By her own acknowledgment she had *never* told him of the little sister, a child when she left home.

Thus, when Gaspard met the Estonia widow and her daughter in England, as English, both highly esteemed for the late great scholar's sake, how should he guess they were the same family as that of the mother and bookworm step-father he had vaguely heard of as living in Italy? The Estonias, too, were a numerous clan. Again, poor souls! how should Rachel and her mother guess that the Count Rivello had but recently inherited that unexpected title, and had hailed it, though an empty one, as Fortune's timely help in enabling him to "turn over a new leaf"?

So time and events hurried on, oh! so happily. And no warning dream, no angel's voice came to tell Rachel that the spring days she blessed, and the love and happy future she thanked God for, must be her last great joy; that the summer's sunshine would be hateful to her soon, and the beneficent sky seem a domed prison-house overhead.

The very day before the wedding, as Madame Estonia, Rachel, and her future husband were all three together, there came the noise of wheels. A murmur of voices was heard outside—above the rest one piercing, that was to the glad ears of the Estonias as that of their dead restored to life!

Mother and daughter sprung to their feet with cries of welcoming joy and outstretched arms as Magdalen burst into the room. Gaspard rose, too, pale and stern of face, seeing his fate had found him out! Then all Rachel remembered afterward was that her loving embrace was thrust back violently. For, with a dreadful outcry, a half-mad, outraged woman raised her arm, arraigned Gaspard da Silva as her husband, and Rachel as her sister, to answer to Heaven for their wrongs to herself!

"Your husband! the Count Rivello!" shrieked the poor old mother of both women. Rachel was stricken dumb.

Gaspard, horrified himself, could not speak.

"Mine!—mine!" she retorted. Then came wild words telling of

ill-treatment, cruelty, of having been left as mad in a Mexican asylum, whence she had escaped with her child, born since its father's desertion. It was Hannah, her old nurse, who had faithfully tracked her mistress to where she was shut up, then rescued her.

There they were, nurse and child. In the background stood Hannah, with her well-remembered, resolute face confronting her master, and little Joy—a babe—in her arms.

Rachel then only saw a man's face looking at her, as if from far, far away across a misty sea of faces and voices; heard these words in beseeching, passionate pleading: "Rachel, forgive me! I never dreamed she was *your* sister!" Then understanding it all, and having reached the highest point of agony a human being can endure, she loathed the fierce light and the eyes upon her, when there came a merciful darkness, blotting all out—hating, it seemed to herself in that moment, the world and all existence, Rachel sunk into blessed nothingness.

Why had she not died, she wondered afterward. What an amount of mental agony people can bear, and live! Our bodies are so curiously fashioned they sometimes seem to go on living out of mere habit, though the spirit within them longs to be freed, and dies daily deaths of most poignant anguish. But she rose up, and being strengthened to see her duty, set about doing it. Their old mother died very soon afterward from the shock, leaving her small fortune to her grandchild when it should come of age, so that Da Silva himself might have no control over this sum. This she did at Rachel's request, who herself solemnly promised to share her own portion—the slender reward of her father's science—with her sister while both lived; for Magdalen's own large fortune was gone, like summer snow.

But before this last happened there had been a further terrible trial for Rachel. Magdalen had declared she would never see nor live with her husband again—perhaps reconciliation with Gaspard was impossible; not that he had attempted it; on the contrary he had, to Rachel's horror, appeared before her in her solitude, as she was struggling back, it seemed, to a life she rebelled against. He entreated, used every appeal and impassioned argument to induce her not to desert him, to be still his life-companion and better angel, so he said; lastly, when all this failed, had tried to carry her off *by force!*

Upon this, their mother dead, the two sisters had fled together. Rachel dreaded Gaspard's violence for herself no less than for poor Magdalen; for in his baffled rage he had threatened to lock up the latter again in a lunatic asylum, in one of those fits of madness which had now again shown themselves, and to possess himself of his child.

Strange that his passionate love for herself should have turned to something so like hate, thought Rachel. *She*, who had been blinded—almost ruined—by him could not have vexed him in the smallest matter wantonly, nor would hurt a hair of his head. And thus they fled to the glen of the Chad, parting from the child the better to defeat pursuit.

Alone on the moors, with only her own thoughts to commune with, Rachel had often dreaded she might go mad like her sister.

Again she would fancy, when her soul was weighed down to the dust, that surely she must unwittingly have sinned some terrible sin to be so bitterly chastised. Then followed weeks, months of awful doubts of God's goodness, when faith nearly died out. She went down in mind to the valley of the shadow of death, through which the only little taper to guide her steps in the right way was her love for her unhappy sister, increased by pity, and a dim feeling that even were there *no* God—did evil prevail through the world—still she herself—Rachel—must do the right!—in defiance of sorrow, misery, although her life should be quenched, unrewarded, like that of the beasts which perish.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I found my poor little doll, dears,
 As I played on the heath one day,
 Folks say she is terribly changed, dears,
 For her paint is all washed away,
 And her arm trodden off by the cows, dears,
 And her hair not the least bit curled;
 Yet for old sakes' sake she is still, dears,
 The prettiest doll in the world.

C. KINGSLEY.

SITTING this day on the moor, Rachel lived her past over again so intensely that she was an unconscious image of sorrow. Dark-featured, but still beautiful, she sat almost motionless for nigh two hours, while the sun shone westering overhead. She seemed hardly to breathe, but for deep low sighs now and again; her nobly-shaped figure was bent forward on her knees, her head drooped, while her large eyes were fixed, dull and listless, on the heathy swells and hollows.

Now, with an effort, she slightly roused, sat up, and looked with more seeing eyes around; now she remembered how, the darkest time passed, she had found her way to a more blessed day—one in which the light was that "which never shone on sea or land," that of a purified, Christ-like love.

When Rachel Estonia came to herself in her lonely new life she had ceased to suppose her afflictions worse than others knew; remembered that the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, and those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, were not offenders above others. Nay, but she must repent! And then, in the hereafter life into which she seemed already to have almost entered by longing, loving anticipation, she should see the meaning of these things clearly which she had been called to suffer, though now she knew them not.

"Let patience have her perfect work."

Her dead father's—Estonia's—words were still living in her mind. "It is in vain," said he, "to think that all the trouble and danger accompanying our discipline might have been saved by making us at once *as we were to be*. What we shall be, must be the effect of what we will be." And this world he had looked on as a theater to show forth our character, not necessarily to an All-wise Being, but perchance to some of his creation, our great cloud of witnesses, earthly and spiritual, in view of higher tasks in eternal life.

Why are the wicked so often happy, and the good afflicted, she had wondered with the psalmist in her past dark days. She wondered less now. What was salt for but to purify, and leaven to mix with the unleavened lump? And if at times she lamented within herself that her love's passion had been so wasted, as it seemed, yet a dim thought vaguely whispered that her prayers might therefore the more avail Gaspard, in that she strove with ever-increasing intensity of purpose to be righteous.

Women are strangely prone to love unworthy men if thrown in their society. How often Miranda is mated, not matched, with Caliban, and Athené to Satyr." Although themselves nobler, although dimly aware their glorious devotion is offered to a poor object, yet they are unable wholly to root out the feeling. Why is this? . . . Surely there must be some great hidden law of compensation in the universe. If the wise mated only with the wise, the weak with the weak, it would be an ill world for the latter. And such good women, if they believe that "all things work together for good to them that love the Lord," will possess their souls in patience and be comforted; seeing that here they are, maybe, instruments in God's hands for saving such men's souls; and there—in the future life—they can trust also to Him. . . .

What helped Rachel most through her long time of trial was her glorious love for her sister. This strengthened her to endure, and warmed her with a glow of heart. And Magdalen had accepted her as a fellow-sufferer, extending her own self-pity in a curious way to Rachel. Gaspard da Silva had ruined her life, she said, and her sister's, too; Rachel "would never get over it," she mutely argued with herself, therefore she also was happiest far away from the mad, whirling world. Rachel had always been so terribly in earnest, ever since she had learned to toddle—yes, even when a grave, dark-eyed baby.

In this way, in her saner intervals, Magdalen taught herself to look on her sister's companionship and devotion as only natural; her imagination so subtly weaving this reasoning that she herself believed in it utterly, and even Rachel wondered at times whether her sister was not right, and that, if even Magdalen recovered, she herself must never know a new spring to the winter of her life.

For the first year or so, poor, afflicted Magdalen no doubt hoped to recover quickly from her distressing malady; then she, as the lighter spirit, would lead back Rachel to "the world," and bid her cheer. Later, she grew used to looking on her own recovery as a longer way off; their utter loneliness of existence pleased her crazed fancy by its freedom, however she railed against it; she grew used to it, and to Rachel's life-service, as a matter of habit.

Magdalen spoke very little; indeed, for days sometimes, would be utterly silent. This was worst when she felt her attacks drawing on. But then!—her fermented imagination burst forth, soaring to such wild heights of bliss, or falling to such unspeakable depths of woe, as those in full health of mind rarely if ever know. Her long-restrained speech was loosed! and now she would talk and talk, with such a sparkling play of wit—wild, weird, but beautiful fancies, though broken, short, and confused—that Rachel thought, with sorrowful admiration, her words were like jewels all fallen

loose from their setting; a kaleidoscope of gems, or sunlight upon dancing water.

Meanwhile Rachel at first, nay, even for long! had hoped and tried to believe that patient love might cure her sister. But as months and years passed, still darkened by periods of affliction, *hope grew tired.*

"Oh, God!" prayed the poor woman often with herself, "let me live so long as I can be of any comfort to her, for the love I unwittingly stole from her. Only for that I am very weary, and would gladly rest."

Evening had come.

Rachel woke up to full reality, and found herself sitting bare-headed in the low, slanting light. The shade of the cromlech had left her, and now was thrown behind in three long shadows on the hill-side. She rose to her feet, and, standing, prayed and gave thanks in her heart. Seven times a day she did so; then was comforted in her loneliness. So having bewailed her life on the hills, and found comfort, she went homeward, with slower steps this time.

When Rachel came within sight of the brown cottage, mother and child came out to meet her, and from a distance she blessed them in her heart. Magdalen approached silently, with her little daughter holding shyly by her hand, the mother's face under her hood having a new expression strangely quiet to her, and subdued. Joy did not speak either; but as she looked up in Rachel's face, moved by some impulse of her quick, warm nature, she took her aunt's hand, and pressed her lips upon it with affectionately childish reverence. Whatever had passed between the two that day, Rachel after that was satisfied.

The two hooded women stood still, gazing down at the bright child between them, feeling as if they were on the other side of a great gulf, having left their youth afar over there; but still glad of the merry laughter and winsome glances sent across to them by this glad young creature, herself the very embodiment of Joy.

"I have been talking—talking more than usual for me," said Magdalen, in the sweet, low voice, the winning power of which was one of her greatest charms when she pleased, but yet with a melancholy ring. "I have been telling Joy that, now she is growing a great girl, she is to go to a good school to be taught like a lady. So now, little one—Juanita—our Joy—you must go home. Rachel and I are best alone together."

Joy said good-evening, therefore, and went back to the Red House Farm, where Blyth was impatiently waiting for her at the farmyard-gate, and old Farmer Berrington in the porch. In the kitchen, Hannah had a noble dish of smoking-hot "toad-in-the-hole" and a fine squab-pasty for supper, with sweet cider to wash it down, and clotted-cream and blackberry-jam to follow.

At Cold-home, Rachel, leading her sister back, lit the lantern and hung it in the window. Their poor supper was only some salted pilchards and brown bread, laid on a coarse but very white cloth. Some coffee was warming by the fire-embers. Magdalen, who ate and drank little, and that carelessly, never noticed that her sister denied herself more than one slice of bread, and drank water after-

ward instead of coffee, reserving what remained of the latter for the morrow.

They might have been lavishly supplied by Hannah from the farm did they listen to good Berrington's entreaties; but being very poor, Rachel strictly forbade any presents of more than she could pay for. Magdalen must not want. But she would have starved herself rather than little Joy, either, should miss anything at the "good school," for which she herself would have to pay, as she now insisted on paying Berrington for the child's keep. Furthermore—was it a weakness?—she tried to lay by a little secret hoard, in case *Gaspard should ever want it!*

CHAPTER XXV.

"Blythe, blythe and merry was she;

Blythe was she but and ben;

Blythe by the banks of Ern,

Blythe in Glenturret glen.

The highland hills I've wandered wide,

And o'er the lowlands I ha'e been;

But Phemie was the bonniest lass

That ever trod the dewy green."

Old Song.

So Joy went to school. Not far; it was only half a day's journey by coach. Dick used to drive her to and from the "Back Bull" (where the mail-coach changes horses) in the spring-cart; for old Berrington was growing stiff in the knees and did not get easily in and out of any vehicle, much as he would have liked to see his pet thus later—or earlier—on her journeys.

Spring came with flowers and showers, then Joy returned at Easter-tide. Summer brought hay-fields and harvest, then none more merry than Joy in the Red House Farm fields through the long sunny holidays. Autumn and its apples and the cider-making she sorely missed, but came back for the Christmas merry-doings. Then they had monster fagots piled in the great kitchen fireplace, and young Steenie Hawkshaw, and girls and boys from the other farms more far than near around, indeed, came to have romps under the mistletoe-bough, and to make havoc in the glorious piles of pasties, apple-pies, mince-pies, and cakes that Hannah had prepared for her darling's return.

Good Hannah! She declared herself most lonesome when Joy was away; yet, in truth, her hands and mind were so full with the day's work at the farm, year out, year in, and she herself so happy in thus being busied, that her nursling's absence gave her only that last luxury—something more to look forward to. Then, when home-coming arrived, how she and Farmer Berrington would perform a mutual litany of admiration and thanksgiving, in which Hannah uttered the praises and the farmer said amen, by assenting emphatic grunts and puffs of smoke.

What prodigious advances Joy had made in learning and looks! How daintily she tripped like a young lady, while her hair grew glossier and rippling, rolled up in a little love-knot, so to say, at the back of her pretty head. And her eyes became brighter, and lips redder, and her figure taller and more womanly. The truth was,

beyond singing and sewing, both of which she loved dearly (that is, ballads, and pretty embroidering of the finer sort), Joy had very little taste for schooling. She learned far more gladly at the farm from Hannah how to bone a turkey and stuff it for supper, in a way new in those parts, than arithmetic. Still no one was smarter in counting the pounds of butter for market, which she did with the help of her ten pretty fingers spread out, declaring to Blyth, who was an excellent scholar, that Nature plainly meant them so to be used.

The old farmer took more and more pride in his pet, calling her his "heart's Joy." But Blyth, who had grown a big young lad, now between boy and man, was getting shy and awkward, and reluctant to dance with Joy and the other girls, yet furiously sulky if Steenie Hawkshaw, never bashful, caught and kissed the Red House maiden like the rest, under the mistletoe's waxy berries.

Meanwhile, once a week, or sometimes twice, Joy would trip alone over the fields dutifully to the lonely brown cottage. Thence she returned with often blither steps, it must be owned, to the fuller joyful domestic life at the farm. But sometimes her young heart would be prematurely heavy with thoughts of the sadness away up there in the glen. Then Hannah would be surely waiting for her, to ask "Is all well?" and would cosset and attend her till she partly forgot about it. Perhaps Hannah thus atoned to her own conscience for living in comfort at the Red House, and gradually coming to think of Cold-home and the glen as miles further away than they really were.

Hannah herself went very seldom now; but then—she was not wanted. After all, in conversation she was only dull, she thought, and a servant serving another master besides. Truly, though the kind soul still heartily loved both her former mistresses in spite of Holy Scripture, yet all she had to tell was of the fowls and bees, the butter and apples at Red House Farm. The past was a topic strictly forbidden; close inquiries as to Magdalen's health were dangerous, and often she dared not go at all for weeks, having received a secret message from Rachel to stay away. She would gladly have helped at such dark hours, but the sight of any one but Rachel only made Magdalen worse, it was found, after one attempt. It is strange how our love slowly turns from those who do not want help to those who do. Hannah would not own it to herself, yet her ardent attachment for her first young mistress, Magdalen, had thus become transferred to Joy. Meanwhile she had long lived as paid housekeeper at the Red House, and was happy.

If little has been said of her lately in this story, it is because there is little to tell. Her daily walks were between the kitchen and dairy, fowl-yard and garden. Her loneliest hours were passed at set times in a service of cleanliness at the deserted shrine of Joy's room, when the latter was at school. Here the worthy woman dusted, aired, and polished, even doubly as much as in the other untenanted chambers of the fine, rambling old farm-house. Then she would say her prayers at night, content to think that no dust left in dark corners reproached her conscience.

If at times a thought like a north blast struck Hannah that perhaps she might have to leave all this with the child and her mistress again, she shivered to herself, stout, strong woman though she was.

She had known wanderings and romance of perils enough; let her rest only now in this blessed land if it might be! What with spring-cleanings and sheep-shearings, and harvest suppers and cider-makings, picklings and preservings, she had change enough in her life to content her.

As to Rachel, the seasons to her now meant Joy's coming and going; her winter began when school opened in autumn, and December's dreariest days budded with gladness at seeing the child. No one knew, not even the girl Joy, how that large, lonely heart pined for her. Magdalen was sometimes vexed, and spoke her thoughts, that her daughter had not more accomplishments like herself, bright talent that would shine in society "some day when they left the moors." But Rachel, if she sighed, smiled also. It is natural in us all to wish the young, in whom our lives and thoughts are centered, to carry on our tastes and life-efforts into a later generation.

"But the child is not of Magdalen's own nature, nor like me," she thought. "She is meant just to love and live, satisfied wherever her lot is cast; and such a woman is blessed and wise in her seeming unwisdom."

And year by year, the more Rachel Estonia was drawn with her whole heart to the child, and longed to have her nearer to herself, the more she saw that it must not be. The lonely life of two women who almost felt dumb from lack of expression was not fit for such as Joy. Poor fare, a dark past for all background of thought, and sometimes as the subject of their rare talk—hopelessness of the coming years! these were not meet for that young lark which sung and fluttered from pure gladness in its spring time of life.

One day this was brought strongly home to her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Oh, the wafts o' heather honey, and the music o' the braise,
As I watch the great harts feeding, nearer, nearer a' the day.
Oh, to hark the eagle screaming, sweeping, ringing round the sky."

C. KINGSLEY.

It was a late September day, warm and still, when old memories stir and rise most in our minds as the year softly dies. Magdalen and her sister had gone up on the moors to spend a long day there in the fresh air and sunshine, as till winter began they mostly always did. Rachel sometimes rebelled inwardly against what seemed, as regarded herself, wasted days spent in no useful work for other children of men, only in wandering over the hills. Then she chided herself. It was God's work, and if her Maker chose thus to employ the high faculties He had given her, might she not remember that "they also serve who only stand and wait"? She dared not let Magdalen stray anywhere alone except up the glen, which last was both lonely and safe. There were shaking bogs on the moors, treacherously green from rank marish grasses, and edged with sundew and cotton-grass, any one venturing over which might lose his life in a horrible way. Many a day, out of pure freakishness, Magdalen

would wander nowhere else but in these parts, shunned by even the few shepherds and moor-men who passed thereby.

Often, for work's sake, Rachel would cut heather to make brooms, and carry it down in a blooming pile on her strong shoulders at sunset. But frequently Magdalen was vexed with her for undertaking this toil.

"It is such labor. Why your hands are as coarsened afterward as if you had been hedging and ditching!" she would cry, looking at her own small fingers, which she carefully kept smooth and white.

"Dear, it brings me in a little money to give to the poor."

"The poor! There are few poorer than ourselves. Why, I would rather go with less food or fire or something. Don't do it, at least to-day, Rachel, to please me; it is lonely for me to see you working, and, as I say, it will spoil your appearance so much, if ever we go back."

So she would break off her sentences. Rachel, understanding, would stop her work. As to Magdalen being ever shorn of any few comforts, Rachel dismissed the thought at once, as the poor creature herself soon forgot it. *If* they ever went back! Ah! Rachel knew hers was a life-task, without any hope to lighten its gloom, not so much as a rush-light's glimmer.

So, on this especial day, the sisters were sitting silent and side by side in an ancient sacred circle of upright stones called the Gray Wethers. There were nineteen of them, some small enough, half sunken, others nine feet high. Tradition said they were once all young folk, who began dancing here on a Sunday afternoon, and were suddenly turned to pillars of stone in punishment for their sin. Furthermore, at noon on a hot day these stones might still be seen, it was believed, courtesying softly, and rising and sinking in a ghostly dance with their gray granite partners.

Joy loved to believe this, and declared she herself had certainly seen them from afar swaying like shadows on water, though it had been a hot midday in broad sunlight.

"Why, of course!" Blyth answered, smiling, with a rather disparaging air, having few superstitions housed inside his handsome flaxen head. "Just so in winter, when they light the stove in church, you may see the air above it quivering and dancing too in a sort of haze. The summer sun is the stove that heats our moors and makes objects near the earth seem tremulous; the devil is not the piper to our poor Gray Wethers."

"Blyth, you are a boy without any reverence," retorted Joy, with dignified reproach, having a most wholesome awe of the devil herself.

It was very warm for September. All around the sisters' eyes strayed wide over rugged, desolate moor that lay up hill and down dale, black bogs showing in some of the hollows. Yet, rugged or not, it was a grand view under that hot, wide sky, softened by an autumn haze and a few lazy clouds low down on the horizon. It was so free—only a few loose stone fences might be seen at great distances, marking rather than inclosing large tracts; and these walls the straying mountain sheep and ponies easily jumped. All around Nature was mistress, and her sway was shown in a thousand

signs, had one eyes to see her delicate handiwork; but, in a few plain words, there was neither sight of human dwelling nor sound of man. Overhead, a moor-buzzard might be seen; and other birds, such as reed-warblers, golden plovers, coots, and water-ouzels, were in the marshy places, and black grouse and landrails, with small song-birds, on the moors. The cloud-shadows swept unbroken in grand breadth over the hills—who notes them in the hedged and wooden lowlands?

True, where man plows and sows, he paints the smiling champagne country with bright colors unknown up here, miles and miles of brown-gold wheat, leagues of paler corn and of meadow-grass, scarlet clover, orchards of rosy flowers or ruddy fruit. Here the heather that made the hills all one broad, violet flush, is over; the golden furze that vied therewith in wide-spread glory is past too, for the most part—what remains? All along the bed of the Chad down yonder mountain-ashes spread low and graceful among gray or white granite boulders, and the brilliant red of their berries glows like flame beside the water's brown current. There are acres of giant bracken, so golden that a bit of mellow sunset appears to lie on earth, or again shading into brown in an unimaginable richness and difference of tints.

This little upland world is all colored in subdued tones; grasses and marsh-plants, lichened or mossy rocks, weather-beaten crags on the hill-crest, tiny flowers that scarcely attract the eye till closely looked at. Yet what infinitely variegated hues the moors have; what a movement of lights and shades; what an exquisite sense of rest and pleasure! Tired eyes feel jarred by no inharmonious contrasts, here where unity of design spreads for leagues around; and, lastly, a peace falls upon the soul in the solemn stillness, where the slow seasons bring such gentle change, and the land rests in a perpetual Sabbath, unvexed by labor.

Magdalen spoke first, and dreamily, as they sat together.

"Joy is away riding over the moors somewhere. The hounds are out—cub-hunting, she said—Blyth Berrington was to take care of her."

"Where were they to meet, dear? You never told me;" and Rachel sat more upright, and looked intently round on the hills that were like a sea, of which the great rolling earth-waves had been suddenly arrested in full motion.

"I forget—I hardly listened." And Magdalen went on with a silent amusement—plaiting little butterfly cages, as children call them, of rushes she had gathered on her way.

The silence was resumed; but before long Rachel exclaimed, low, "What is that?"

Across the broad, green hill-side before them, on the far side of a deep comb, as she gazed, surely her keen vision caught sight of something like a fleeting speck—another; and while she still doubted, what seemed a white patch, a fragment of snowy cloud from the sky, swiftly racing over the moor. Then followed a scarlet dot in motion—more red dots.

"It is the hounds—there is the hunt!" Magdalen cried, in excitement.

The hill looked as steep as a house-roof, as seen from the stone circle; but distance deceives.

"There is a darker clump of riders—not red-coats. Joy must be among them," Rachel uttered, watching these last specks with intense earnestness of gaze.

To right of the hounds fled away a little cluster of what seemed at this distance tiny shadows, that was a herd of ponies. To left, another, up the hill-face—those were red cattle. The pack swept up to the sky-line; the darker flecks—as the riders still seemed—followed them to the breezy ridge—disappeared.

"The play is over," said Rachel, then.

Her sister rejoined, grumbling.

"Yes; it was like the ghostly hunt on the Hartz mountains. It is too bad—all over so soon! We shall see no more now, I suppose."

Not so, however. After a few minutes a musical sound came faintly wafted to their listening ears; again, again! Down in the glen, among the copse-wood, the hounds were giving tongue now. They must have come at a tremendous pace to be there so soon. Then a reddish object became visible, making for a gorse-path by the Chad, stealing out soon by another corner as the hounds dashed in. Hu-sh! straight up the slope to the stone circle, leaping along among heather and gorse, came the handsome red creature, a fine cub fox. Magdalen and Rachel, who had risen to their feet, stood still as statues. Perhaps poor Reynard thought them only two more of those upright Druid stones as he flew past in his hot race for his life, with the hounds, who had now viewed him, streaming up the slope at a bloodthirsty pace.

He went straight toward a treacherous black bog, between the two nearest hills, with despairing cunning. Another few moments, and the sacred circle was full of a mass of eager hound-heads, and white and dappled bodies, and waving tails, as the pack burst through in full cry. Behind, three riders came thundering *noiselessly* up through the heather.

What, Joy! Joy herself, riding on a moor pony with handsome Steenie Hawkshaw, wearing pink, and riding close beside her on a black hunter; while a more modest black Sunday coat kept as jealously near on her other side. He was mounted on his good mare Brownberry, his heart's pride, and he was watching sternly from under his broad brows both his impetuous charge, his rival, and, above all, the hounds. Joy waved her whip, seeing the dark figures first.

"We are leading them all—the rest are behind—bogged, I think," she called, in a delirium of ecstasy, as they galloped by, her last words coming fainter on the breeze. Her dark hair had broken loose, and was blowing behind her in a veil; her face was joy itself in brightest being, with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks. Her still childish figure wearing a blue short habit, she sat her rough bay pony as if, like a true daughter of the moors, she and the little animal were one.

"How well she looks, the little flirt! Oh, if I were but young again!" cried Magdalen, her blue eyes sparkling with the excitement of the scene, as, leaning on a stone pillar, she watched the three ride

down to the quagmire with such intentness she saw and heard nothing else.

But Rachel's fine ear caught fresh hoof-strokes behind on the soft sward. She looked round, anxious to escape the sight of more human beings, who always excited her sister's poor crazy brain. Some of the belated riders were coming up, old Hawkshaw's burly figure foremost, a mass of mud on one side from his eyes to his spurs, and his hot temper the worse for the bogs. Seeing the sisters, he pointed the butt of his whip at them with a brutal oath.

"See there!—blast them! No wonder we have bad luck to day, with those old witches looking on to spoil sport. See them—devil fly away with them."

There came bursts of laughter, but warning exclamations from the other men—broken sounds—such as, "Keep a civil tongue, Hawkshaw." "The black sisters." "Best let them alone." The voices hushed as the sportsmen urged their panting horses past the sacred circle: not a sound was uttered, and several of the farmers, as these men were, looked the other way. Rachel's gorge rose. "As if we had the evil eye," she said in her heart, deeply hurt and indignant. Then, from long habit, she quickly turned with fearful caution lest Magdalen in a frenzy should scream and leap out in anger against them.

Her sister had heard nothing. She remained with eyes fixed on the bog below, through which the hounds were now floundering. Blyth Berrington waved to Joy in a masterful way to come after him by a track he knew of old, and few save himself and the shepherds.

"This way, Joy, follow me—this is the only safe part."

"Don't mind him. Let me be your guide, and you shall have the brush," laughingly cried Steenie Hawkshaw.

Blyth's boyish face flushed red.

"Joy! My father desired me to take care of you."

"Then you can do so by *coming after her*," mockingly answered his handsome enemy. "Is he your master, Miss Joy?"

The two young fellows in their hearts hated each other. Joy looked from one to the other. Blyth's tone had nettled her pride, and he truly, like most fair-haired lads, looked younger than his age. Long-limbed and raw, with only callow down on his face, his body was as yet thin and awkward, though bearing the promise of future great strength. But Steenie already was a grown young man, middle-sized and stout enough. His gypsy face, high-colored and full-lipped, with black whiskers, was that of a youthful Bacchus now, though it might coarsen early to appear a Silenus, like his father.

Joy looked, one swift moment, at his gay, laughing features, then at Blyth's wrathful expression, like a righteous Saint Michael still in his teens. The hounds were running fast; there was no time to tarry.

"Go on, Mr. Hawkshaw—I'm after you!" she cried, and pressed her pony forward.

The sagacious, moor-bred animal sniffed the ground and stopped dead short, stiffening its fore-legs to a decided nay. Joy, angered, struck it sharply.

"Obstinate beast!" cried Steenie, and brought down his heavy hunting-whip across its back, behind the saddle, to help matters, as he forced his own hunter past her.

Joy's pony snorted with pain, and sprung forward against its better will and knowledge, lost its footing, struggled. In front, young Hawkshaw's heavier horse had plunged deeper in the morass, and both were wildly floundering to regain firmer ground.

"Help me, Blyth--help me!" rang the sweet young voice that had the most power of all sounds, human or otherwise, over Blyth Berrington's mind.

He forgot the bay of the hounds, then in full cry in view of their tired fox, turned back on his own sure path (indeed, his eagle eyes had hardly quitted Joy's figure but to guide his mare, and he had checked Brownberry even before that cry struck on his ears). Just a few moments--then, having dismounted, Blyth caught Joy's bridle, and cheered her little steed by voice and hand to some strong efforts that landed it with trembling flanks on the sound heather. But her saddle had turned, and he must needs see to the girths, while good Brownberry stood obediently by, though with pricked ears, hearkening to the distant sounds of the hunt.

"Hooray! I'm out!" shouted Steenie Hawkshaw, bogged no longer, who had struck on Blyth's former track, and was pursuing it with joyful selfishness.

Two minutes more, and Blyth, with Joy safe in his wake, was after Steenie, followed in cautious single file by the later riders. A last gallop over a breezy upland, then the good cub ended his short life in a rock corrie. And--

"Here is the brush, Miss Joy. I told you I should get it for you," cried young Hawkshaw, with gay bragging, bringing his trophy up to the two riders from the Red House Farm, who had come--just late.

Joy scornfully knitted her pretty brows and turned from him.

"Keep it yourself. You would not have been in first at the death if Blyth had not turned back to help me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Le temps emporte sur son aile,
Et le printemps et l'hirondelle,
Et la vie, et les jours perdus,
Tout s'en va comme la fumée,
L'Espérance, et la renommée,
Et moi qui vous ai tant aimée,
Et toi qui ne t'en souviens plus!"

A. DE MUSSET.

As Rachel Estonia went homeward with her sister, she could not help often repeating to herself, "Those old witches!"

It is always a shock to be called *old* for the first time. Can one be really old and not feel it? Though still a beautiful woman, however tried by hardships and sorrow, the brutal words rankled in Rachel's mind like the evil of a poisoned arrow, even albeit her Christian charity had made her draw out the dart by forgiveness. Oh! if she and her sister were so scouted and shunned, how dared she wish even in thought for Joy's young life to be blighted by living with them in Cold-home's dreary mud walls?

"That young Hawkshaw looked pleasant as he rode past beside Joy," said Magdalen, suddenly, that night.

There had been silence in the cottage for two hours. The lantern burned in the window-sill, the thin red curtain was drawn before it, so that a warm glow like firelight was shed therefrom. Magdalen was crouched as usual among her cushions on the settle with her guitar, but did not touch it. Her sister was knitting stockings by the light of a tallow candle; at moments she glanced at Magdalen watchfully—she was afraid.

"Pleasant! He must be different from his father, then," Rachel answered, rousing heavily. Curiously, her thoughts had been on the Hawkshaws, too—"those old witches."

"Why, your favorite, Blyth Berrington, is a mere farmer's son in comparison. Young Hawkshaw looked quite like a gentleman."

Rachel dropped the subject gently. She knew what was in her sister's mind, and sighed in her own. Women are always prophetic of possible marriages for the children they love. Ah! well, she trusted Joy might like the plain farmer's son best.

Presently, Magdalen's eyes began to sparkle, and she pushed away her guitar impatiently. It fell with a clang; yet fond though she was of the instrument, calling it her "Ariel, her little treasure," she never heeded, but muttered to herself unintelligibly, with ever-increasing vehemence and quickness. Then Rachel rose, and barred and locked the door, putting the key in her pocket. It was as she feared. The sight of the cub-hunt and riders recalling thoughts of her past life, of youth and gayety, had roused the sleeping furies in poor Magdalen's brain, to which her light bright spirits had turned.

That night, as on many a one before, Rachel took her life in her hand when she locked the cottage door.

She must be alone. If a breath of rumor spread among the moor-folk around, who knew but they might believe themselves in danger—might drag the frightened, shrinking creature Rachel loved so dearly to the hopeless dungeon of a county asylum, whence there would be no joyful coming forth again to enjoy the freedom and health-giving breezes of the moors once more.

What danger there was in-doors Rachel would brave alone with faith, thanking God in heart for her great physical strength. Outside, the river was deep and swift in the pools, and the moor wide and treacherous at parts; and what risks might not a distraught soul run, if broken loose from restraint, and wandering out there through night and bog by the water-side.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Come with the springtide forth, fair maid, and be
This year again the meadow's deity.
Yet, ere ye enter, give us leave to set
Upon your head this flow'ry coronet;
To make this neat distinction from the rest,
You are the prime, and princess of the feast."

HERRICK.

"A LETTER fur Farmer Berrington—it be from furrin parts, I reckon," said the parcel-carrier who was also in a lesser way post-

man, stopping his shaggy pony at the Red House Farm gate, and addressing Dick, who was gently resting from immediate labor in the picturesquely old, and it must be owned, somewhat untidy farm-yard, as is the manner of those parts, though all told of ease and plenty. Dick, like his fellow-laborers, found hearty spells of rest comforting after toil, unless, indeed, the eyes of his master or young master were on him, when pride, no doubt, will urge a man to greater exertion. But the Berringtons, father and son, were in the meadows, where the hay-making had begun.

"A letter," said Dick, taking it between a most inquiring-natured finger and thumb; but as the latter had learned no more how to read than had his head, this was little profit. However, he had the solace of a prolonged easy conversation with the carrier before observing, "Well, good-mornin'. Mistress Hannah, hur be in the kitchen, and I'll take un to hur."

Hannah was busy, as always, shelling peas into a fair basin of spring water, and she did not fail to reproach Dick's laziness in gossiping at the gate. Her northern energy was terribly untiring to these easy southrons. Then she called Joy in turn, who was busied upstairs in the dark wainscoted passageway, putting rose-leaves to dry in the sun, for which the deep window-seats and sills of the broad, ancient casements were useful.

"A letter! I'll run and give it to him," cried Joy, flinging on her sun-bonnet, and running out past the bees and through the orchard down into the meadow.

There were the mowers in rows, toiling in their shirts, with bared, vigorous arms. Blyth led the row, as was right, by reason of his strength and powerful scythe-sweep, no less than because he was the young master. Joy stopped to watch him. Swish! with a sweep and a backward stroke; and swish! with a sweep again. And the grass and clover softly fell long, green swaths, so different from the meadow's pride of the morning that Joy was quite sorry to see it.

Seeing her, Blyth stopped at the edge of the field, and made a feint of using his sharpening-stone on the scythe edge with a clirring sound, not to seem idly fond of talking to a young maid in the men's eyes.

"Have you brought me some cider, Joy?" said the young giant, eying thirstily the far cans under the shade of the oak-tree.

"No; a letter," returned Joy; then, guiltily blushing, "but, oh, I forgot; it is not for you. It is for the father, only I—I—don't see him here."

"Why, he is over there, under the hedge," returned Blyth, but not looking himself in the direction indicated; rather slowly staring, thinking how well her blush became Joy's clear, olive skin.

"Oh, I see. Now, why could you not tell me that before?" pouted the girl.

She turned, leaving Blyth, with a man's natural justification stopped short on his very lips, and ran, light and lissom, across the meadow to where Berrington was examining a gap in the wildly luxuriant tangle of native holly, honeysuckle, briony, thorn, and traveler's-joy atop of a high bank, which Blyth called a hedge, while it was truly a screen of flowers and foliage.

"You come flying like a fawn, when I've seen the red deer out

on the hills," said old Berrington, slowly, smiling at the girl, with her dark, liquid eyes. "What have you there?"

"It's a letter for the master. And I'm wondering what's in it."

"Spoken like a woman. Well, writing, Joy—I—should—think."

So saying, Berrington slowly turned and turned the letter round, examining the postmarks with great deliberation.

Joy felt the blood rise again under her dark skin. The child—for so she still was, in spite of her seventeen years—remembered suddenly that, though no such letters had ever come within her knowledge to Red House Farm, that was no good reason for herself, in reality still a guest, to pry into the good man's correspondence. She generally called Berrington, after a pretty notion of her own, "the father" when speaking to Blyth, and "the master," in a laughing, roguish way to himself or to others. It was hard to say what else or better she could have called him, for "Mister Berrington" would have been truly stiff.

She felt embarrassed, but the farmer's hand was laid caressingly on her shoulder. A shout from Blyth relieved her. He had ceased mowing, having come on a belated landrail's nest, and just escaped the vexation of injuring the faithful mother-bird.

"I must go—I am coming," cried Joy, loving all animals and birds tenderly, but especially fond of hearing the hoarse cra-i-k, cra-i-k of these meadow-watchers through the summer nights.

Away she sped, and heard no more about the letter till after supper-time. Then, wandering with Blyth out in the gloaming to find a strayed galini-poult or guinea-fowl, feminine curiosity got uppermost again, and Joy asked,

"Well, did your father get any news to-day, Blyth? His letter had Australian postmarks. I did not know he had any friends out there."

"He has not chosen to tell me anything about it yet, anyway," said the young man. "My mother's brother went out to Australia, I believe."

The evening was dark and cool, and fragrant with white mountain-ash blossoms that swung overhead and scented the air; yet Joy felt suddenly hot and shamed and displeased with herself and the night. For she had secretly fancied the letter might have contained some news for herself. It might have had reference to—her father. In truth, it was for that same thought that Farmer Berrington had been so slow to open it when with her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Like a fawn dost thou fly from me, Chloe,
Like a fawn that astray on the hill-tops,
Her shy mother misses and seeks,
Vaguely scared by the breeze and the forest."

LORD LYTTON'S *Horace*.

NEXT day was Sunday; and after church and the midday dinner, Blyth asked Joy would she take a walk with him over the moors. The farmer was fast asleep, with a handkerchief over his face, in his big chair in the parlor, which was dark and cool this summer's day, being wide if low, and wainscoted all in dark wood after the

fashion of good Queen Anne's days. Hannah was likewise nodding in the kitchen among her bright army of tins and coppers, with her Bible on her lap, and a low fire banked over till it should be time for tea. It was dull and silent in-doors, even in the pleasant old house. Outside the animal world was resting, too, chewing the cud, and the birds still in the noonday heat; yet the breeze was fresh, and the insects danced, and the river rushed by, gurgling an unceasing song, telling of motion that was life, life, life, of the hurry of each water-drop to do Nature's work, out from the earth's bosom, down to the sea, up to the clouds, falling on the grain, and beginning again in a ring eternal.

The farm stood with one foot on the moor, so to speak, and an invigorating fresh breeze could always be felt from the hills; the heather was springy underfoot as they left the meadows, and the sheep run over the first furzy hill.

Away went Blyth and Joy over the upland they both loved so well, and drew in long draughts of the breezy, high air. Down into gorges full of oak-scrub, up again on heights overgrown with bracken for a mile or two, till a wide, lone valley spread before them, with not a sign of human or animal life in it, or on the violet, heather hills beyond, save a few half-wild cattle browsing here and there.

The Chad was running merrily through the valley, young and brown yet, from its source among the peat-bogs higher up in the hill's wild heart.

Blyth silently led Joy still on to where, half a mile away, the little river's banks became picturesquely rugged with high bowlders stemming the current and piled in confusion along the stream's edge, while the rowan-bushes grew in and out of the rocks where their roots could find hold. Bushes they were up here, not trees—vegetation had dwindled.

"Shall we sit down a little while, Blyth?" said Joy, as they came up to the rocks, which offered pleasant seats, with cushions of springy heather for one's feet, and where the small cup-moss she loved to look at raised its tiny crimson goblets over the surface of the old, grim stones. She went on, with gay pettishness, suddenly turning to her comrade with a flash in her dark eyes and a bright smile.

"I am tired of walking, and not talking. At least this livelong day I have always had to answer myself. You are quite strange and silent."

"I know. But I have something to tell you by-and-by," assented Blyth, gravely, to her surprise. "Will you mind sitting on the tolmen this last—for this time? I am fond of it."

Midmost of the brown brook a great whitish bowlder lay, with a large hole through its upper end, worn smooth by the dash of wintry floods for ages. It was perhaps no true tolmen after all, but such some Moortown antiquarian had supposed it to be, wandering thereby, and the name had fastened to it. They clambered easily enough on the great holed stone from the other rocks, for now the Chad was low with summer's drought. Joy took off her broad straw hat and let the gentle wind cool her young brows and ruffle her hair. She waited in silence, with growing impatience. But at last, as her

companion did not speak, she cried out, thinking him dull and herself injured,

"Well, Blyth; You *said* you had something to tell me?"

"I have." Blyth straightened his back and looked her full in the face. "Should you be sorry, dear—should you mind much if I had to go away from the Red House?"

"What? and my holidays not over yet!" murmured Joy, in dismay. "Oh! I know; you are asked over the moors to stay for the big sheep-fair with some of the farmers you met last time. But that is not till next week, and I go back to lessons and primmishness in three more days for another whole half-year. There are to be some junketings, I suppose, you don't want to miss. Well, go—but I call it very unkind, Blyth—I do, indeed."

She was near crying. The pleasures of the farm-life, of even being with the old farmer and Hannah, both of whom she loved, faded suddenly at thought of losing her strong slave—young tyrant that she was.

"No, it was not the sheep-fair. I am going," said Blyth, slowly, "to Australia for two or three years."

Joy gave such a start that he quickly caught her round the waist, or she might have slipped down into the water.

"Going!—why?" she exclaimed at last, with a gasp. "Oh, Blyth, I know—it was that dreadful letter. I wish I had put it in the kitchen fire."

She burst into thick sobs now, not heeding hardly that Blyth drew her closer to himself, and petted and coaxed her, his own heart indeed being far more sore than her own. She only felt irrationally *what was the use* of his having been her big brother all these years, and she his loving little sister, if now half the world was to part them and sorrow come and desolation?

"My mother's brother has written—my uncle," Blyth explained. "He is a lonely man, and childless, so he wants to see me; and speaks of leaving me his sheep run. He seems well-to-do."

"I don't care who he is, nor what he has," wept Joy, unconsoled. "Once you go out there, I believe you will forget all about us, and never, never come back."

She had turned away, and bent her face so low over her knees Blyth could not see it, being so much taller as he sat beside her.

Next instant he dropped his body through the great hole of the tolmen, finding foothold below on a slippery rock; and so bringing his visage on a level with Joy's pretty face, rather to her surprise, wound his arms again round her slender waist.

"Look here, Joy," he said, reddening, "I swear to come home—if you will have me—to marry you. And, if not, then I don't care if I never see the farm or my old father again; yet you know how I love them both! Say—will you marry me?"

Joy pouted, half laughing in his face, with the tears, arrested by surprise, still hanging on her long lashes. She did not feel herself mistress of the situation, being fast held there; and besides, though she had grown up insensibly with the thought that she could never bear to part from Blyth, still she rapidly remembered the romantic ideas learned from her school-comrades.

She should be wooed before being won.

Now Blyth, to her mind, was only a great tall boy still, in spite of his having nearly reached the one-and-twenty years of manhood; and he had surely never rightly wooed her.

But Blyth, looking at her with blue eyes all gleaming, feeling a mighty rush of manhood's strength of purpose within him at thoughts of facing the great world, seemed to himself to have been wooing her all through his young life.

"Speak, Joy—dear—surely there is no one that you like better," he reiterated; claspings her tighter.

"Why, that is it. I have seen so few besides you, Blyth," replied the school-maiden, with dignity. Then, seeing, by the pained tension of the muscles round his mouth, and by his eager eyes—divining, too, with her loving heart—how much it cost her dear boy-companion to go away across the world of waters, Joy cried, torn asunder betwixt her supposed self-duty of pride and real affection,

"Oh, don't look like that, Blyth! Listen, I will promise to marry no one till you come back; and then, if I have seen nobody else I like better, why—why—"

Joy stopped, blushing, she did not well know why. After all, she had known Blyth all her life, and to agree to live thus always together seemed quite a simple matter, she thought, in a childish way. She considered her lover raw-boned and awkward, and not at all romantic.

"Will you put your hand in mine and promise me that?" urged Blyth, still not taking his eyes off her.

Joy laid her small palm in his, and said sweetly,

"I promise."

"Will you kiss me now?" said Blyth, very low.

"Oh, yes," replied Joy, who every night of her life was quite accustomed to give Blyth a flying kiss, aimed at whatever part of his cheek or forehead was attainable, since he generally bent his head, as if half ashamed of her caress before his father and Hannah and the servant-maid. But now, as Blyth's lips touched hers for the first time, and of his own accord, for many a month, with a close, eager pressure, it was—well, quite different.

He drew back then an instant, and it seemed to the young girl as if the evening sun had transfigured the young giant. His yellow hair shone like gold; his look was noble; his face strange—that of a man.

"Let us go," she said, in a quavering voice, wishing to laugh at her companion, but feeling as if something, she knew not what, had happened to them both.

For a moment Blyth seemed as if he would fain have kissed Joy again; but seeing her discomposed face and pretty lips quivering in doubt how to take it all, he controlled himself, and only pressed her two little hands in a grip that nearly made her cry out. Then, raising himself by the power of his arms, with a strong swing, out of the holed stone, he helped her off the rock, and they went gravely homeward by a different way.

They hardly spoke again; and when they did, it was with constraint, and about the long voyage and Australia. Joy felt she did not understand Blyth, for the first time; and he felt that it was so, because she was truly a child still.

Slowly they skirted the stream; then they came to a strange bridge, a huge granite block laid across the Chad. There was no other such stone nearer than the pillars of the sacred circle far away yonder on the hill-rise, and yet the rude Britons of by-gone ages had put it simply down here where the river was too deep to ford, as if it were a plank. Blyth, crossing the narrow surface steadily, turned and held out his hand to lead Joy. Often enough before she had tripped lightly across, scorning aid, or yet many a time had taken his hand, thinking nothing of such slight help. But this Sunday she hesitated, drew back; then next moment, seeing Blyth looked vexed, though silent, she gave him her hand, urged by another impulse, and so followed, feeling bashful and ill at ease. So they mounted the swelling ground toward the Raven's-tor, so-called because these birds frequented the mass of rock that crowned the hill's crest like a huge mushroom.

All around here lay remains of an early British village; stones were placed upright in small circles, with boundary walls surrounding them; there were bigger pens, or pounds, maybe for sheep or cattle; and at some distance ran a long avenue of upright stones down to the river, such as are said to be seen in many other parts of the world, though to what purpose, unless as a sacred symbol of some lost religion, who can say?

Blyth stood still, after they had picked their difficult way through all these blocks lying close together, half hidden in heather and furze, or scattered in seeming desolate confusion.

"It's a strange sight," he remarked. "Look at that old village lying roofless, while the cattle and sheep have been wandering through its walls for how many hundreds of years. And yet there were men and women living in it, Joy, who once felt like us."

"I think they must have felt more like savages; don't you think so?" said Joy, innocently. "The father says, when he was young, no one knew this was a village. It looks as if a crop of rocks was sown here; not a straight line anywhere."

"I've read somewhere that they had round huts; then, most likely, they would fill up the space between these uprights with peat and furze, and roof the top with poles and sods, like a brown beehive," said Blyth, smiling at her in a curious way.

"Ah! I see, you think how ignorant I am, with all my schooling, while you know so much, though you only read now at home of nights," exclaimed Joy, ingenuously, with frank admiration. "But then, I have no head for learning."

"Nay? Well, so long as you have heart enough, the head does not so much matter," returned Blyth, oracularly.

He had not smiled at all in disdainful pity, as she wrongfully supposed; no! only at the thought of how many men and young girls in those by-gone, hoary days must have lived and loved here, and passed, hand-in-hand, over that old bridge, under which the Chad still flowed, young as ever. But Joy had not understood him.

So they went home to the farm, the young man and the young girl, who was still a child in heart.

Blyth Berrington, therefore, sailed for Australia; but Joy went back to her schooling for another year, only broken by holidays at the pleasant Red House, that seemed lonely now by contrast.

Still the red light of the lantern glimmered nightly across the ford of the Chad; and still the "wisht" sisters lived their secluded, silent lives in the little cottage at the mouth of the lonely glen; or, if sometimes seen by the peasants wandering over the moorland, were shunned as witches, in spite of their deeds of mercy.

CHAPTER XXX.

"Merye is in the time of May,
Whenne foulis singe in her lay;
Flowres on apyl-trees and perye,
Small fowles singe merye.
Ladies strowe here bowres
With rede roses and lylie flowres."

Romance of "Richard Cœur de Lion."

NEARLY three years after Blyth Berrington had sailed to Australia, Joy stood one evening at the Red House Farm gate.

The fields were deserted, the farm noises stilled; but overhead, in the plain of the sky, the first faint lights of the watchers of night were trembling in the east, and down in the copse by the river the nightingales were singing rarely. Above her drooped long plumes of golden laburnum, white lilac on either side of the gate scented the air, and a wild-rose on a bush trained up the gate-post leaned over to touch Joy's cheek.

Behind, even in the gloaming, the Red House looked glowing and trim. It had all been painted fresh, against Joy's return, by the old farmer, and the brick walls and tiled, steep roof, with the dark-red wood-work of doors and windows and carved barge-boards, made the fine old farmstead seem quite a proper home for gay young folk, so he said.

So he said! Joy, turning her head as she remembered the fatherly glance at herself with which good old Berrington had accompanied the words, thought it did truly look a pleasant home. She had herself dressed up the windows with red blinds, to carry out a fancy that the color of such things pertaining to the house should help to bear out its name. The now shadowed garden itself was full of tall white lilies and pinks, columbines, monk's-hood, and all such sweet and long-lived flowers; the rosemary and southernwood, and such-like pot-herbs, more for savor than sightliness. But the borders round the house-wall gleamed even in the twilight with the warmer hues of gaudy favorites which Joy had planted there to carry out her freak—apothecary roses, with their crimson leaves and yellow hearts, red sweet-pea, flaunting peonies, and an army, not yet blown, of such gorgeous great poppies, emperors of their kind, that all the farm-house neighbors near and far envied the show and begged for some seed. Farmer Berrington had laughed at her; she might do as she pleased, being "the joy of the house," he said.

No wonder Joy thought of his words, for she knew what he meant. They had had no letter from Blyth for some ten months, and yet in his last he had said his uncle was failing.

"I am not the man I was, either; so I hope my son can be spared to come home," old Berrington had opened his lips to remark. He was hearty still, but had grown so heavy that it was a trouble to him

now to walk much about the farm. His broad, ruddy face had become grayer and heavier, either with time or perhaps his son's absence, for such silent men do not take to other folks' company lightly, or at all, maybe, when those they most care for are gone from them. But still his glance would always light up at Joy's presence, at the flash of her splendid black eyes and her sunny laugh; and she knew what a warm, still quick heart housed in that mountain of flesh, where careless or dull eyes only saw a stolid and ponderous old man, oftentimes afflicted with gout or shortness of breath, and such like ills.

Joy had grown taller, fuller in form, fairer to look on in the last three years. Now, as she stood there in a pale cotton dress, with a white muslin kerchief folded over her bosom, she was—beautiful! She laughed in her heart, being young and glad, as she thought of Farmer Berrington's sayings, and half hid her face, blushing at its own fancy, in her arms folded on the rail. But then she sighed soon, and raising her head looked down the lane, as if her thought would fain see into the dark future as her eyes sought to pierce the shadows. For Blyth had not come home; and—he might have changed his mind. He was only a boy in heart, though a man in years when he left, she believed.

And when he had asked her to plight her troth down by the great holed stone she herself was a mere child, and knew nothing of life or the world, and had seen so few besides himself. But now—Well, now, not a young farmer for sixteen miles round the moors but would gladly ride far on the darkest night on the chance of meeting her at any merry-making. For she was reckoned the greatest beauty in all the country, so they told her. But she thought, alas! so many of them mere yokels, however well-grown of body and well-housed at home. Perhaps it was her schooling had done it, or some inbred greater gentleness of race; but she felt there was something in herself they lacked each and all, and longed for more signs of gentility in her lovers.

Stephen Hawkshaw, indeed, was beyond the rest. But then he had been to college (though he could not pass his examinations, it was rumored), and he aspired to be considered an equal by the younger sort of gentry, as his father loved to be called "squire" by all the meaner sort of folk who wished to scrape favor with him. Yes, he was handsome and merry, and admired herself, without doubt. Did she like him? Joy asked her heart. Why, yes; she did. Better than all others, even old friends? Well, better than the rest of her farmer suitors; as to old friends, she must see them again to know. Heigh-ho! what would old Hawkshaw say, though, should his son ask leave to bring home a dowerless maiden to the Barton? And Joy began singing to herself, careless and happy whatever might betide.

Meanwhile, at this same hour, on this same evening, a young man was walking toward the Red House Farm, along the lane that led from Moortown. He was very tall and broad-shouldered; he wore a large soft hat of fashion unknown in those parts, and a short, yellow gold beard that was likewise a rarity in those days. Even by the make of his clothes he was a stranger for certain; so that the maidens by the bridges over the hill-streams, and the men jogging

homeward on their rough ponies, while they called out " Good-evening " in the friendly fashion that was usual, wondered who he might be, and gazed curiously after him.

" Good evening," he always cried, but strode on with the help of his big stick, never stopping to have a chat, never thinking how, behind him, all the girls said how handsome he was, and the men how big and strong. And yet he felt as if he loved them all. He loved the soft-faced maidens, and the men with their kindly, lazy speech, the nestling villages in the wooded combs, the tumbling brooks and the mossy mill-wheels. Then the sight of the wide moors and the free hills and craggy tors up yonder, the flocks of sheep, the soft-eyed, red cattle knee-deep in the fords, and in the brooks the beds of tall, yellow-lilied iris, and the sweet, breezy air he had drunk into his lungs since boyhood—he loved them all. For he was Blyth Berrington.

As Blyth neared his home with swinging pace, leaving mile after mile more and more gladly behind him, he did not heed that he was becoming footsore—he did not waste thought in grumbling that he had not found man and cart, or any vehicle or beast even, to bring him from Moortown.

He thought, instead, how purely white the lane glistened here and there in the twilight, with the granite dust ground down from the rocks; and again, how deeply rich and red was the earth where plowed, the land his forefathers had lived on so long. Then never had any other country such hedgerows, such banks and lanes, so great and deep, so massed with holly and broom, and wildly luxuriant with all twining, twisting plants, that curl their tendrils with the sun or contrariwise; such a paradise of ferns, or such an English wild garden of flowers, from the Lent-lilies opening the season, with their yellow bells shaking music soundless to our grosser ears in the mad March wind, to the great summer army that followed, and the last of the laggards of autumn.

Blyth's heart gave a leap in his body for pure gladness when first he saw the Chad again; and then he hurried on faster than before, while it came foaming and singing and tumbling along the road beside him. As each well-known landmark came in sight, his eyes grew dim often enough, and his heart felt very soft, while his throat foolishly swelled. And, as among much we love, one object is still singled out specially, so even while Blyth watched for the first sight of the Red House chimneys above the oak-trees, and often wondered how his old father might be, and whether he was yet hale and well, still truly the most secret fires and deepest tenderness of his feelings were reserved for the image of one other well beloved—were urging his well-nigh jaded body on with fresh efforts to see her dear self face to face again.

He remembered a young, slight girl, half-child still, with flying feet and lissom, still unformed figure, whose dark eyes were flashing with merry mischief, or opened wide in pure deep innocence. What would Joy be like? how would she meet him? and where—

He was near home now. He came up the lane with beating heart, and surely, surely there was a shadowy figure gleaming pale at the gate. Who was it? Was it—could it be she?

Meanwhile Joy, straining her eyesight at the handsome stranger in the darkened light, watched and wondered too.

Blyth approached, then stopped short, and, taking off his broad hat while he bent forward to see the maiden closer, asked,

"Will you have the kindness to tell me does Farmer Berrington live here now at the Red House Farm?"

"*Blyth!*" screamed Joy the instant he had spoken, and held out her two hands to him across the gate.

He caught and pressed them hard, and so, approaching close, they looked at each other, quite near a few moments, in utterly astonished breathless silence.

Joy saw before her no raw, fair-haired lad such as he who had gone from them, but a finely-made man, with a handsome, open face, and who carried himself with an upright, steadfast sir, as one who knows he is of some worth in the world, but assumes neither more nor less.

And he? He had never thought Joy could have grown so beautiful! Her eyes, full of dark liquid light, flashed a welcome in which surprise was lost in great gladness. They were the same eyes he remembered well ever since Dick had first lifted her as a little child out of the wagon at their gate; but otherwise all her features seemed to him not changed but glorified. He had loved her ever since she was a little rose-bud child; when he left she had been like the young flower only beginning to unfold its beauty; but now she was

"A rose in June's most honeyed heat,
A red-mouthed rose, that woman of the flowers."

More by token she wore a full-blown red rose in her bosom, which she rivaled in glorious beauty and sweetness.

So he looked at her a few moments, not speaking. The hush of the hour was around them, the night-scents of the flowers in the garden was fragrant on the air; and from the long lush-grass of the meadows, still standing in their summer pride, came the hoarse cr-a-ik, cr-a-ik of the landrails, the night-watchmen of birds.

Then, with all these sights and sounds and scents around him he had known since boyhood, Blyth found his voice again. He cried, hardly knowing what he said, only conscious of glad surprise,

"Why, Joy, you are a woman!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"The larks are loud above our leagues of whin,
Now the sun's perfume fills their glorious gold
With odor like the color; all the world
Is only light and song and wind wherein
These twain are blest in one with shining din."

SWINBURNE.

Joy and Blyth were up on the moors a morning or two later. Before them lay a long, sloping hill-side yellow with gorse, sweet of scent, alive with music of gladness; for, as old Dunbar sings,

"The skies rang with shouting of the larks."

They rambled where their feet had so often strayed together as children: for Blyth said he felt as if he could not look enough upon

all the old spots he loved, nor take his fill of the strong, sweet moor-air again into his lungs.

How young and happy and handsome they both were, wandering over the heather and bracken! The sun looked down with a great shining eye of love upon them out of a deep blue sky, swept clear of clouds by the high breeze. The lintwhites and stone-chats whirred in and out of the furze before them, playing courtship; the brown bees droned heavily by, honey-laden from the heather, working for their home and hive. All things around in earth and sky seemed only to speak of love and gladness and mirth. They were in the heyday of their youth and beauty, and the gorse was in bloom when "kissing is in favor."

At last, after a quick hour's stretch up the hills, which tried their breath, good walker though Joy was, and because Blyth had been so long pent up on ship-board, they sat down on the hill-side to rest. And then it was little wonder, as Joy sat on a flat stone, like a young princess of the moors in her proud beauty, that Blyth stretched himself at her feet in silent worship; and while he let his gaze rest on her now and again by stealth, felt sweet and secret thoughts creep about his heart.

Her hair, that waved in strong, glossy ripples back from her pretty ears, was black as were the ravens yonder up at the tor, with blue lights in the sun, such as none of the soft-complexioned, brown-haired maidens round could equal. The sunny, laughing face, with its clear olive tint and glorious, dark-red glow of health, showed, too, such a gleam of snowy teeth between her lips! which last were like

"Red rowans warm in sunshine, and wetted with a shower."

And her eyes were dark suns, lighted up with frank affection for all the world, yet holding depths of untried love for some. Joy was not by nature a deep-thinking girl, or given to learning, or with craft or ambition in the least degree. Yet neither was she light or shallow, nor even simple—a woman to love and be loved, caring deeply but for few, may be, but for those with all her heart and soul, besides her duty to her Maker; blending passionate, earthly feeling with religious devotion. A woman who could tend and toil and moil for husband and children to her last breath, and still be happy, having them.

All the while, walking, Blyth had only talked of Australia—by fits and starts interrupting himself to exclaim on the home-sights round him. He spoke in answer to Joy's repeated and rather pertinacious questions, and answered her about the climate, and that his uncle had been kind to him; so that he was sorry when the old man died, though it left himself free to come home after settling what business remained. But, though thus talking, it was curious how little he *told*! He never said if the dead man had been rich or poor, or had left himself aught. Joy little heeded; she kept to the subject because it was so *safe*. She was quite sure Blyth would hold back no secrets from her. But when they sat, neither spoke much for a time; for indeed Joy was rather silent for a woman, and her eyes often said more than her tongue.

At last Blyth said, softly,

"Joy, do you remember, one August evening, a little while before I went away, nearly three years ago, we were coming over Black-tor there, and found some white heather? I have the sprig you gave me still."

Joy, surprised, blushed a little as he deliberately drew a leathern pocket-book from the breast of his coat, and showed her, carefully wrapped therein in paper, a small brown sprig.

"It—it has nearly crumbled away," she said, suddenly embarrassed.

"Yes," answered Blyth. He did not wish to hurry her, so added, in a musing way, "Don't you think you might give me a fresh flower, now?"

Joy looked at the young whortleberries that grew thick and pale-green underfoot, and then around, where only golden gorse met her gaze; and *that* she could not give because of its meaning.

"Wait. There are flowers of all sorts at home in the garden," she said, laughing under her breath at him. "Wall-flowers, and—and bachelor's buttons and lavender."

She had thought of prettier flowers even in the haste of her answer: pansies—but their other name was jump up-and-kiss-me—and rosemary—but that meant remembrance; while forget-me-nots must not be thought of.

"Yes, and there are hen-and-chicken daisies and rose-peonies and—and monk's-hood and snap dragon. I wonder you do not offer them too, Joy," said the young giant at her feet, rather angrily.

But his heart was so soft toward her that love extinguished anger, and he added, in gentle reproach,

"I should have liked a red rose, such as the one you wore the other night in your breast when I came."

"Oh, I nearly always wear them; our red roses blow best. Perhaps—but I do not promise," answered Joy, still smiling in her glorious fresh beauty above him, and keeping her light air.

"Joy, will you come back with me past Raven's-tor, and down to see the holed stone—again?"

"But, Blyth, you forget; the sheep that the father wished you to see are on the other side of the valley."

A little silence. Young Berrington, strong, handsome, and traveled as he was, began to feel as if he was getting no further in his love-making. Nevertheless, the fresh west wind blowing on his face brought a sense of elation and briskness of spirit in its breath. And all the earth was full of secret strivings, budding, and bursting to sure success in blossom and fruit, which makes spring the season of hope. Lying there on the heather hills owned by his father, seeing with lazy, half-closed eyes their own flocks of sheep, all baaing and springing and browsing around, with a large red B on their fat flanks; and further on all their grazing cattle in the valley; and the meadows with the milch-kine near the brown, stout farmstead walls just to be descried in the distance—seeing all this, I say, such a sense of solidity and well-being brought comfort into Blyth's soul, that with Joy, his dear little playfellow of old, and sweetheart now, beside him, he could not believe it possible he should lose her any more than these.

So, plucking up courage, he beat about the bush no more, but went manfully straight to the point, though with some awkwardness of voice and inward hesitation.

"I have not yet spoken to you, Joy, about the question I asked you when I went away, two years and a half ago—whether you would be my wife. But since I have been at home these two days there has been so much to see on the farm; and my father and Hannah always beside us, to hear any such talk; and I feared it would seem too soon, too—"

"Yes, Blyth; it would have been too soon."

"Maybe. But to-day it came upon me you might think my mind had changed," pursued Blyth, keeping to his point as steadily and straight as he had often driven Dogberry and Dewberry, their last farm bred pair of horses, through the heaviest furrows of the low wheatfields when holding the plow. "I do not want to harry you, nay, nor hurry you either, dear, God forbid! You are under the shelter of my father's roof; and, rather than vex you by presuming on that situation, I would go back to Australia, ay, for a year, till you had decided in your own heart; or—for always!"

The blood had come into Blyth's cheeks, and a clear ring to his voice now, as he faced his own words. He had scarcely meant to say this last; and yet, now he had said it, he believed it was right, and meant to stick to it.

"No, no, no!" cried Joy, warm and quick, all her lightness gone, and speaking with her whole loving woman's soul. "You are too generous, Blyth. It is I who must leave the farm if we—disagree about this matter. I am not your father's daughter, dearly as I love him. You are his son; and he is an old man."

"Why should we disagree?" Blyth went on, sturdily, almost stolidly. "You are so fond of my father and the Red House, and we have been fast comrades ever since the evening you came as a little girl in our wagon; and I loved you at first sight then, as I do now. Why?—but have there been others while I was away? Tell me, Joy, *have there been others?*"

His tone changed, with the last turn in his thoughts, to one of almost stern insistence. Vexed with him, Joy cried back, in frank and saucy petulance,

"Others! yes; half a score of admirers. Do you think, sir, that no eyes but your own should like to look at me?"

"To admire you is one thing, and is quite natural; but what I want to know is this: do others, or does some *one*—whom perhaps you like—seek to *marry you?*"

Blyth spoke heavily, only wishing to learn how far matters had gone. For if this girl, his dear little playfellow of old, was unhappy, he must help her, at whatever cost to himself. But her hasty woman's mind overshot his meaning, like an arrow sped by one of too fearful a heart, yet no coward, rather one imagining and daring the worst.

"I thank you, Blyth Berrington. You are worldly wise. Hannah taught me as much long ago, though, in an old Scotch song of hers; so I am not at all offended."

Upon which Joy raised her voice, and sent it thrilling clearly over the furzy lea, singing,

“Be a lassie ne’er sae black,
Gin she ha’e the penny siller;
Set her up on Tintock tap,
The wind will blaw a gudeman till her.

“Be a lassie e’er sae fair,
An’ she want the penny siller,
A flie may fell her i’ the air,
Before a man be even’d till her.”

She sung with a merry, mocking lilt, as if not caring a straw. Yet however quick to take fire, and brave to scorn her own pain, Joy was still more guileless in all things, and her lip trembled. Blyth saw it, slow of perception as she thought him.

“I don’t like your Scotch words, nor their meaning,” replied he, with gathering warmth, fixing his blue eyes full upon her, and rousing like a sleepy young lion, who shakes himself and rises from his couch. “Your song is folly to an honest man, as satire often enough is. Here am I, for one, no better, I fear, than most men, unless they are fools or rogues or liars. Yet I would hold myself more lucky to get you for my wife, with only the gown on your back, than another girl who owned all the forest of the moors and the lowlands that run for twenty miles down to the sea. There!”

“You are a good man, Blyth Berrington,” breathed Joy, with heaving breast, and breath that quickly came and went. “But there is more to say. Could you hold up your head, proud as you are that the Berringtons have been honest people for generations, if the other farmers round knew that you had married *a convict’s daughter?*”

Her eyes shot a gleam like a swordfish, accompanying the swift thrust of her words. She thought to herself, “By this I will try him.”

Blyth never flinched from her gaze, but, standing straight and strong on the hillside before her, raised his open hand toward the sky in grandly simple attestation of his words.

“As there is a heaven above us, I swear that I would marry you if your father, grandfather, and every man ancestor of your family each swung on a gibbet on every tor round the moors!” Then resuming his ordinary quiet manner he came near, and said, tenderly, “Darling, is that all?”

“No,” whispered Joy, so moved she could hardly speak. “There is—did you know—my poor mad mother down there in the cottage?”

“Yes; I guessed it long ago. My father told me as much as he could, without breaking faith, three years ago, and Hannah let out more, as women will. Poor child! does that thought distress you so much?” and Blyth dropped on his knees beside her, the better to give her comfort. “Dear Joy! she was driven crazy by an unhappy marriage, and her temper was not one to bear such troubles well, I have gathered. But if kindness can soothe her declining days, let me help—”

“Ah, how do I know that she will have me, Blyth? I owe her all duty because she is unhappy; but still she has her reason between—

whiles, and will talk to me often, poor soul, of leaving the moors, and of her ambition for me."

"Her ambition! and what is that?"

"She wishes me to marry a rich man—a gentleman."

Blyth gently drew back a little, and an odd smile, small of its kind, sat a moment on his lips.

As to Joy, the moment she had spoken, looking at him, a glow of crimson so spread in a shamed tide from her beating heart over her cheeks that she hid her face in her hands and wept. Her soul had melted within her, thinking how the friend and comrade of her whole young life had spoken to her, and how she had answered him. Besides, she could not look at him, for he seemed a new man. What was this feeling?

Had she not always known that Blyth had a noble head, and hair as yellow as a wheat-field, and eyes as blue as the far, far sea one could just see from the top of the highest tor; and that he was straight and tall and stalwart as any young oak down in the wooded country. But never before had it come to her to wonder how it would be if, for the last time, she saw those eyes turned up to hers in honest, dumb beseeching—to go away and never see Blyth or the Red House nigh again.

And yet others (Steenie Hawkshaw for one) were handsome too, and admired her, and—Oh, it is hard for a girl to know what is best sometimes, as also what she truly wishes!

"Don't cry, dear; don't," said Blyth, pained. Then he spoke with a sort of sorrowful wonder, his voice seeming strange, yet as familiar to her as the scent of the gorse, or the larks' songs and the sun shining; she knew its tones so well, though the words were new. "But, Joy darling—surely you love me a little?"

"I do *like* you very much, Blyth," she answered, with quick breath. "Indeed I have always loved you as a brother, and do so still. But whether I care for you more, this is the whole truth—I *don't know!* See here, this is what I fear, that you and I have grown up so used to being together, as we are used to the Red House, and seeing the Chad flow by, and the heather grow in the hills, that we may mistake this feeling of habit and true liking for the highest passion of which our hearts are capable. Then, if we found out our mistake too late, we should be miserable. When you went away, I was still almost a child, too!"

"That is true. But I was a man in heart, and have come to know my own mind as fixed, while far away."

"There has not been time for me since you came back to know mine; and, besides, I hardly know you for the same again," murmured Joy. "Give me time, Blyth—a long time."

"Would a month be too short for you, Joy? To me it means four long weeks, and I have now been here three days too."

"A month—let it be at least midsummer's eve. That is only a few days more," she pleaded.

"Well, let it be as you wish, dear. Meanwhile, at least tell me this, that you are free. If my chance is as good as another's, I will not yield to any man. But if not—if not—you must trust me indeed as a brother. And—I—will swear to help you."

He spoke slowly and sighed. Joy did not mistake his slowness now.

"I am quite free; oh, yes," she said, low and clear. "Thank you from my heart all the same. Come, dinner will be waiting, Blyth. let us go home."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"Of all the torments, all the cares,
With which our lives are curst,
Of all the plagues a lover bears,
Sure rivals are the worst.
By partners in each other kind,
Afflictions easier grow,
In love alone we hate to find
Companions of our woe."—WALSH.

THAT same afternoon, after he had been on the moor with Joy, Blyth sought out Hannah in the wash-house, hoping for a few private words. But the good soul was almost invisible from the steam of hot water rising out of the great tubs around, while piles of wet clothes surrounded her like the thick clouds over which angels peeped their heads and shoulders in the farmer's old family Bible. Mistress Hannah was scolding, washing, and vigorously directing two farm women who were wringing out the linen—all in a breath. As she turned a hot red face of inquiry to Blyth, and wiped her forehead, he felt it was not the time or place for love-confidences.

"It is Saturday evening, Hannah," he said in her ear, with a significant look; "so you had better let me carry the basket to the Logan-stone, now I am home again. It is too heavy for you, after all this hard work."

"Well, as to its being too heavy, there is no labor I would call too great for *those ones*. I've done it these three years, nigh since you went away, and the master had to give it up when his legs failed. Still, it's a good offer, and I'm obliged—and this week's wash is heavier by ordinar' with all your clothes forbye the rest. Besides, it's safe enough, for only Miss Rachel ever comes for the basket, and if you walk off directly she'll not see you."

"Quite so, quite so," responded Blyth, turning on his heel with alacrity, and with pleasure in his heart. "Then that's settled, Hannah, I'll take it."

He distinctly meant to seek a private interview with Rachel Estonia, and plead his cause and gain her aid, if possible; and now he knew how to do this without rousing Magdalen's quick suspicions.

When the evening fell, it was the custom at the Red House after supper for old Berrington to sit in the porch, with his pipe and some beer comfortably placed beside him on a small table. Joy, meanwhile, might be straying near him in the garden, tying up pinks, or otherwise tending the flowers, or taking a stroll down the lane. Each one enjoyed his or her ease after their own fashion. And Hannah, for her part, reigning over the back premises, generally inhaled the cool of the air in the poultry-yard outside the kitchen. Here Blyth found her on this especial evening, sitting in state on an inverted bucket, while a crowded court of scratching, clucking hens and their broods surrounded her, little dreaming she

mused how many should find early deaths and grace the pot, or go to market.

"Here is your basket ready—a batch of bread of my own making, and Miss Joy's butter, some eggs, and a little bit of flesh-meat (they don't eat as much as a sparrow's Friday dinner). It's heavy enough," Hannah said, hardly looking up, still counting her chickens.

"I wish they would take the loan of a cow from us, and graze it up the glen. Goat's milk is not fit for them," observed Blyth, without yet touching the burden that awaited him.

"Ay, pride's an ill horse to ride; and, for my own part, I never found plenty a plague," sententiously returned Hannah. "I was thinking just now that next year I'll rear more young game-hens. Their eggs are delicater, and your father likes them, forbye that those at the cottage up yonder will eat them when they care for no other." (Hannah always used vague terms when speaking of the sisters at Cold-home. They had not wished to be known as ladies, and wondered at; so in her respect she was troubled to find any suitable phrases.)

"Hannah, I wonder how we should get on without you," said the young man, suddenly. "You would not like to leave the Red House either, and turn out now, after making yourself and us comfortable for so long; would you?"

Hannah gave a jump on her bucket, and turned almost pale. Her big person was so visibly moved she quaked like a jelly.

"What do you mean, Blyth? I ask pardon, Mister Blyth?" she asked, her voice quavering; adding with sinking heart the correct form of words so long disused in her mouth, "If so be that I have not given satisfaction—"

Blyth kindly stooped and patted her shoulder.

"You good old goose! It's nothing of that kind; but can't you guess my meaning? If Miss Joy"—here he lowered his voice—"if she were to like other places and people better than the Red House and us—why, you would go away with her, too, I suppose?"

"Oh, I see; yes—that's it. You took away my breath very nearly," gasped Hannah, trying to recover the shock of this new view of possibilities. But her puzzled mind refused to grasp the change of ideas as to her future, and she could only utter in feeble protest, "But I thought that you and she—at least, you seemed made for each other from you were children. And the master—he was by way of telling me you were courting her only this blessed morning. Besides, there's no man after her to compare with yourself in these parts; unless to some folks' minds that young Steenie Hawkshaw."

"Ah—Hawkshaw? And does he come often, Hannah?"

"More often than *my* will allows him," returned the old woman, emphatically. "He may have a handsome face, still there's an empty head behind it, and a poor heart below it. But there! I spoke up for you while you were far away; for, thinks I it's a poor hen that can't scrape for one chicken, and Miss Joy has only me to look after her. But now you're back, and you're not the man I take you for if you need an old wife's help in courting."

"Her mother wants her to marry a gentleman, Hannah. And they say, Steenie Hawkshaw calls himself one now."

"A gentlemen? Oh, Lord, drat his impudence! I've known too much of that sort of gentleman in my life," replied Hannah, with a snort of indignation.

"You would prefer an honest farmer like me. Well, I am glad to have you on my side, Hannah," smiled Blyth, adding, in a slightly scornful tone, "And if becoming a gentleman depends on a fair stock of grandfathers, or a smattering of learning, or even a longer purse than one's neighbors, why, who knows but I might hold my own with my rival yet?"

"It's not all that," sobbed Hannah, fairly overcome now. "It's *the airs* that does it! Your mother was a lady, if only a governess; and his was a gypsy, they say, and not rightly married either. But no matter; it's always airs as gets folks on in this world, and he's got the best of them."

"Well, good-night, Hannah; I must be going."

Young Berrington caught up the heavy basket like a feather-weight and trudged off. He was secretly well pleased with the probable result of his own wiliness, and thought gayly enough, "All is fair in love or war."

The night was falling when he parted from Hannah in the Red House fowl-yard. The darkness had deepened when he found himself waiting behind the Logan-stone. He listened, it seemed for a long time, but heard nothing of human presence—only a night-jar's cry, or the short, fine squeak of the bats flitting around like winged mice, or perhaps a cry, as mournful as that of a lost child, which came from the white owls who lived up in the wood, and were now hunting their prey of "rats, mice, and such small deer" in noiseless flight. At last he distinguished a light footstep coming stealing over the ground, halting in an uncertain way, then fitfully nearing him. It approached.

"Miss Rachel!" said Blyth, stepping out from the black darkness of the big stone.

There was a cry. He saw a white face one instant; the next, a black, slight figure went speeding away through the night like a scared shadow, and he knew he had frightened Joy's mother.

"It is only Berrington—Blyth Berrington, he shouted, in his fresh, honest voice, to reassure her.

But no answer came back, though he waited and listened long. And there lay the basket. Heartily vexed, and not knowing what was best, Blyth at last took up the cottage provisions again which he carried as far as the little porch of Cold-home, setting down his load with a sound thump, and clearing his throat with a resounding "Hem!" before remarking aloud, "I beg pardon—the basket!"

His fancied a nervous wailing could be heard behind the cottage door, and soothing whispering sounds of answer. As he slowly retreated, Cold-home door opened, and by the lantern he could descry the sisters' figures, both peeping after him. He halted and hesitated.

"Thank you, Blyth—I had lamed my foot with a thorn," said Rachel's clear voice, reaching him some yards away, though she seemed to speak low. "Don't wait."

Blyth Berrington took off his hat courteously, though they could

hardly see the action. He went home in the darkness less gay than he had gone forth that night, feeling—foiled.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

“If we would love and lovèd be,
In mind keep well these thingis three,
And sadly in thy breast imprent—
Be secret, true, and patiènt!

* * * * *

“Thus he that wants ane of these three,
Ane lover glad may never be,
But aye in something discontent—
Be secret, true, and patiènt!”—DUNBAR.

THEY were very busy at Red House Farm with the moor-ponies. These had been driven in from the hills into a stone-fenced pound, and then Blyth and his men chose out of those branded with George Berrington's mark, all fitted for breaking-in for home use or for sale. The latter were now confined in a large lower yard, where they behaved much like school-boys when holidays are over and lessons not yet begun, alternately playing with, kicking, or biting each other.

“There is a beauty. Oh, I should like to have that one myself to ride,” Joy had cried, pointing out a jetty black pony, with never a white hair upon him.

This was a handsome little animal, with short, thick fore-legs, a broad, intelligent forehead, and prominent eyes; short in the back, and with strong hind-quarters.

“He is the pick of the basket,” quoth Blyth, looking at the little beast with sage deliberation. “You are right, Joy; and you shall have him. I will train him for you myself.”

Whereupon, he gave orders to Dick that no one but himself (Blyth) should touch or meddle with Blackberry, as Joy soon named her choice. All the Red House horses were called after berries of some sort. Blackberry was to be the young mistress's own pony, and required a careful education. Dick only put his tongue in his cheek, and at once resolved, like the obstinate old blockhead that he was, to have his finger, when possible, in this pie.

This training of the moor pony is like unto the Firstly of the short discourse of this simple chapter. The Secondly concerns an incident of the sheep-washing on the farm.

The Chad had been partly dammed in the near meadow, at a spot where it ran shallow and sparkling, after having just made a wide pool, firm of footing, and not much deeper than would reach to a well grown man's knee. Here, time out of mind, the Red House sheep had been washed; and here, once more, the cleansing of the flock began. But presently, while overlooking his men, young Berrington's soul became sorely vexed within him.

All the laboring men of those parts had most easy, if not lazy notions of what a day's work might be. And while he, who had always felt proud and glad of exerting his strength—and came indeed of a different race long ago than theirs—had brought back fresh vigor and ideas of energy from Australia, without doubt the farm-

work had been growing more and more slack in his absence. Old Farmer Berrington seemed to have lost heart while his handsome son was away. His weight of flesh was a heavy burden upon him. Because he suffered from gout and swellings of the legs, he could only move about slowly and not far; wherefore, his men behaved more and more as if they had all bad legs too. Dick was the worst, being as nearly a rogue as an honest man can well be; also that often privileged plague, an old servant.

So now, as the sun grew hot that day, so did Blyth's inward wrath, as he from time to time urged on the easy-tempered laggards who washed the sheep, while another man passed each animal down, and boys and sheep-dogs kept the flocks from straying. Meanwhile, Joy and old Berrington looked on from beneath the shade of an oak-tree on the bank, and saw little amiss.

"Isn't it a pretty sight?" exclaimed Joy, rejoicing in the warm sunlight, the fresh, early green of the trees and grass, the shining of the clear river above and below the pool, the pastoral scene, with all the woolly, gentle creatures crowded together, the mild baa-ings and barkings that filled the air.

"I am quite sorry for the poor sheep in the river, they bleat as if they disliked the water so much. But see, as each one is washed and set free out there in the meadow, how happy they are. It makes one think of souls passing through the river of death, and enjoying themselves white and spotless in the happy fields of Paradise."

"Well, now, that thought surpasses mine," said old Berrington, admiringly. "I had only thought this sheep-washing reminded me of the Baptists on a christening Sunday. I've seen them dip as many as forty in this very Chad, away down by Moortown, at Dippers' Hole, they call the spot. There is a rock mid-stream where one man is placed lest any should drown, for the pool is deep enough to souse them over their heads and ears. I was mortal sorry for some of the poor maidens, who looked grieved over their Sunday finery all dripping. But the happy souls!—now that is a pleasant thought to dwell upon in one's mind. Is it not so, Blyth? Eh, boy?"

"Joy has always sweet and pleasant thoughts, sir, I think; and what is more, she gives them to those who only look at her," said Blyth, looking up at the girl under the tree no less admiringly than his father had done, only—differently. Or perhaps Joy thought so, for she gently murmured something about helping Hannah in the house, and flitted away in her pale cotton dress, like a spring butterfly. When she had gone, Blyth could stand his dissatisfaction no longer. He had hitherto restrained himself, but now he called out in anger to the men that he could wash two sheep himself to every one of theirs, ay, and better! Their task at this rate would not be over by sundown. The men paused and looked up at him. Dick slowly grinned and made reply:

"Well, young master, us don't know as to that. Two to our one! he, he, he! Well, mebbe her had better try."

"I will," cried Blyth, his blood fired; so, pulling off his coat and waistcoat, and rolling up his shirt-sleeves, he waded into the pool and began his task in thorough earnest, yet dealing gently with the dumb beasts. He had some ado to keep his word, for the men, of

course, at once brisked up, and, grumbling to each other in murmurs, were apparently resolved to thwart him in so shaming them.

"One, two, three, four, five! Blyth had so far gained, and old Berrington above on the bank saw fair play, and enjoyed the sport counting aloud for them. Presently a little lad called out that a man was riding up to the farm-house.

"It is young Steenie Hawkshaw," said old Berrington, shading his eyes—for Blyth was too fiercely busy to look up. "He will have come to wish you a welcome home, Blyth, for he was over here lately just before you returned. Will you not leave off now and go to see him?"

"No," said Blyth, shortly, his face having hardened at the name. "He may come to see me if he likes."

"Is it worth while to keep dogs and yet to bark one's self, my son?" said the old man, in a low voice that only reached Blyth's ears, who was nearest him.

"Yes, father, it is," said Blyth, just pausing one moment to wipe the sweat from his brow, and going on again. "If the dogs are watch-dogs and don't give warning, or sheep-dogs and won't guide, it is worth while to teach them their duty. Then if they *won't* learn get rid of them."

Ten! fifteen! twenty! Blyth had still kept his word, working grim and silent, and the men, seeing that, had become half surly, half admiring. They were doing their best now, but he did better. Mortal man could not have worked harder; only that but a few sheep remained, he could not have held on at that rate much longer.

Time was passing, and still young Hawkshaw tarried up at the Red House. Blyth was wrathful and jealous in heart, but, because of pride, would not stir a step to greet his possible guest. At last his old father announced, like a speaking watch-tower:

"Here they come—Joy and that fellow Steenie. Will you not come out of the water now, and get your coat on? The young sprig is fine enough for a wedding."

Blyth raised his eyes, and saw a pair pacing softly down the meadow by the hedgerow side, with such a dainty, easy motion and mutually agreeable air that there and then he almost hated his rival, as if the latter were Agag, who came delicately; and if Blyth would not have altogether hewed him in pieces, yet he verily gnashed his teeth upon him in secret.

"I will not leave off till every sheep is washed—not for any man," he said, desperately; temper and pride had kept him in a false position after hearing who the new-comer was. And now—

"What, Blyth, are *you* there?" cried Joy's clear, flute-like voice, astonished from the bank.

Gazing up as he held a struggling sheep in his strong grasp, his arms and massive throat bared, his yellow hair feeling damp upon his brow, Blyth, with naught cool about him but the fouled brown water in which he stood immersed, knew that the beautiful, dark-eyed girl above him must needs be contrasting himself as a lover with his rival at her side. Gazing through the level sunlight, Blyth saw that Steenie Hawkshaw was handsome, indeed, though with a devil-may-care, licentious look in his restless black eyes. He wore

a riding-coat and a new hat, and kept slapping his boots in a swaggering, dandified way with a hunting-whip.

"Halloo! Berrington, my old friend Blyth; devilish glad to see you back! Hard at work already, eh? like—like the best laboring man among them all," he cried, patronizingly, in answer to Blyth's gruff enough greeting (for they two had never been friends).

Blyth held his peace, but there was a hoarse laugh among the men, and Dick allowed himself to make reply.

"Her is raight enough there. I tell 'ee thic, young Hawkshaw, not another man on the moor could do the laike. Her has beaten ussen—vairly."

A murmur of grim assent went up from the other men, which so heartened old Berrington that, with his face shining and ruddy, not unlike a setting sun, he explained the matter.

"Capital! excellent! You have come back still just as much a farmer as ever from Australia, I see," cried the young man, nodding with a most irritating air of lightness, or so it seemed to Blyth. "I came to bid you welcome back especially, but 'faith the dairy, where I found Miss Haythorn, was so pleasant, and the garden too, that it was impossible to hurry. Indeed, we should only have disturbed you, it seems, ha, ha!"

"That was precisely why I did not hurry up to the house to meet you. I had no doubt you were both enjoying yourselves, or you would have come down to seek us sooner," retorted Blyth, with a fine air of careless, if not contemptuous, good-humor.

Joy blushed rosy-red, and half cried,

"Indeed, Blyth, it was only—" then stopped herself.

"I fear I must be going soon," said Steenie Hawkshaw.

"Not without something to eat!—nay, or at least to drink in my house," put in old Berrington, hospitably. And pressing the point so as to overcome the young man's slight and assumed unwillingness, the good farmer hobbled slowly, with help of his stick, to the Red House.

"I will be with you in a few minutes," called out Blyth. "This is my last sheep."

He did not wish to go with them dripping like a wet dog, and all disordered in dress, as he was, for Joy to note still further contrasts.

In a few minutes, once they were out of sight, he leaped on dry earth, and going up the Chad to where the river ran clear as crystal, there among some hawthorn bushes that made a hidden arbor he rapidly cleansed himself. Then feeling fresh and cool again, however rough his toilet had been, Blyth hastened with long strides toward the Red House.

He was late, however, for on entering the farm-yard, there was Steenie Hawkshaw already mounted on a handsome, well-bred mare.

At that moment old Dick, who had left the sheep just before Blyth, on pretext of his other farm-yard duties (in reality because he felt dry and wanted cider), passed by, leading the new pony, Blackberry. The old fellow believed Blyth still safely down by the river, so was disobeying orders, partly from love of contradiction, but also to spite Steenie Hawkshaw. If the latter did ride a fine hunter like the mare, at least he should see that the Red House boasted a pony not to be matched on the moors.

The pony, that was still as wild as a hawk, came by snorting with excitement, straining at his halter, and showing off at his best to Dick's secret triumph. Suddenly, seeing the strange mare, Blackberry wheeled round and, with mannerless mischief, sent up his heels against her in a sound kick, just to show he hated in his free heart all such well-trained servility.

Steenie Hawkshaw uttered a big oath. He brought down his hunting-whip with a furious lash upon the pony's back, and in his rage might have done so a second time, but that next moment Blyth intervened. He caught Blackberry by the head in an iron grip; for with some maddened plunges the pony was almost breaking loose from old Dick's hold, and was backing wildly toward the stable wall, against which Joy stood pressed, too frightened to stir—indeed, not knowing what side to fly to, as the startled animal dashed now here, now there.

The girl put up her hands, as if to shield her face, and knew nothing for a few seconds of confusion and outcries. Then came a hush around her. Opening her eyes, she now saw Blyth holding back the still struggling pony in a corner, and soothing it. His eyes were blazing, his rough farmer's coat torn at the shoulders; for Blackberry had forced him back upon an iron hook in the wall, while Blyth himself was protecting Joy. On the other side, Steenie Hawkshaw, on his mare, which he had now succeeded in calming, offered a still but striking contrast. He himself so spick and span, the mare well-groomed and well bred, though a trifle weedy, while Blyth and his maddened pony looked like a struggling Centaur, rude and wild—so one were they, man and beast, in that fight.

"Go to the house-door, Joy; go now, dear," quietly called out Blyth, adding, between his teeth, "If you can't keep your hand from striking, Hawkshaw, you might at least control your tongue."

"I owe you no apology for that brute of yours nearly laming my mare," retorted Steenie, hot and quick. "As to Miss Haythorn, she will forgive me, I'll answer for it, for a mere hasty word."

He was off his mare in a jiffy as he spoke, and with profuse murmurs of penitence and comfort after her fright, gallantly led Joy, who had not yet stirred, to the shelter of the house. Then he took off his hat with a deep bow, remounted, and rode away, with a farewell nod to his rival, and an air of gay flourish. Blyth, meanwhile, looking on, dared not leave his wild charge, and was maddened with foolish wrath that Hawkshaw should have struck his lady-love's property, and then have so impertinently ventured to console her. He told himself he was only angered lest Blackberry's temper should be spoiled at the outset of training; but he did not believe himself.

After soundly rating Dick—which relieved his mind a little—he went to see Joy. But Hannah, who was in the kitchen, told him shortly enough he might spare his pains, for her young mistress had gone upstairs to her own room and was crying.

"Crying, is she?" returned Blyth, aghast. "Why—why—she was startled, no doubt; and yet she did not use to be so timid. Why, Hannah, what is the matter?"

For the old nurse turned, and looked upon him with an eye of scorn.

"You are a fool, Blyth Berrington!"

"Perhaps so, Hannah; but still it is not very civil to say so, for no one is as clever as they would like to be," said Blyth, with grave satire. Then he saw the old woman's eyes held tears, which she dashed away with her knuckles.

"Why do you go and demean yourself, then, this day, into looking like any working man, just when Steenie Hawkshaw comes here as fine as a jay? It's enough to vex any girl who may be trying—not that I know—to make up her mind. And when one is as fond of your father and you and the farm as any woman can be, it's heart-breaking to see you spoil your chances!—oh, go away out of my kitchen, now, do! The bread is burning in the oven—I smell it."

On which Mistress Hannah flung open the oven and banged it to again, and whisked all available kitchen utensils out of her path so energetically that Blyth knew no more would be got from her then, so slowly, sadly took himself away. He scarcely saw Joy that evening, who pleaded a headache. How fallen was he from his first joyfulness of home-coming! All things seemed to go amiss with him.

Poor Blyth!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"The dance o' last Whit-Monday exceeded all before,
No pretty girl for miles about was missing from the floor;
But Mary kept the belt of love, and oh but she was gay!
She danced a jig, she sung a song, that took my heart away."

W. ALLINGHAM.

It was a summer night of hospitality and merry-making at the Red House.

Old Farmer Berrington had invited all his neighbors and friends round—ay! as far as Moortown—to rejoice with him over his son's return. The parlors were full of guests. A great supper-table just now groaned with food, which had cost Hannah a week's cooking; ale had frothed, cider flowed, jaws had wagged busily on the part of the elders, while the young folk let their tongues and laughter loose. And now the good cheer had been cleared away, and dancing had begun.

Joy had adorned the house with flowers and wreaths till the doors seemed bowers, and dressed herself to seem more distractingly pretty than ever in the young men's eyes. Many a whisper told her so; many a glance or sigh. But among all her suitors, she recked little of what any thought of her excepting Blyth Berrington and Steenie Hawkshaw. These two rivals strove hard against each other for her favor, urged her to dance, and, while beating all the rest from the field, yet would neither give way an inch. Joy's eyes were flashing, her cheeks flushing, and pulses beating, for love seemed to breathe round her like the sweet smoke of incense, making her reason giddy, and admiration was offered her as in a brimming cup, of which she might drink deep.

Every maiden in life almost has her hour of triumph. This was Joy's.

To-night she would surely make up her mind which of these two she could love best and like to live with all her life. As yet she did not know—and to-morrow was midsummer's eve!

Blyth was so strong and handsome, and had been so good to her for years. But again Stenie Hawkshaw was handsome too, with a reputed dash of deviltry in his behavior that was no disfavor in women's eyes; was looked on as a young squire, and the best match in the country. *She did not know!* She held back her love perforce as yet till her mind decided, feeling that then her soul's whole force and passion would rush forth to be poured in happy libation at the feet of her master, never to be taken back.

But as yet she was queen of herself, though this night must decide.

"Neighbor Berrington," uttered old Hawkshaw, patronizingly, "this is the finest supper I have ever sat down to in these parts in any farmer's house. I say so—I declare it is!—you may be proud of it!"

"Well, well, if the fatted calf was rightly killed for the return of the prodigal son, one may as well do as much when the best son God ever gave comes home safe with his blessing," said George Berrington, solemnly enough, yet slowly smiling and puffing out a cloud of smoke. For the elders had retired to finish their ale and cider at leisure in the big kitchen, while the young people were footing it merrily in one parlor, and the matrons gossiped and watched in the other.

Meanwhile no one looked outside, at the hills, the moor, and sky, while in-doors was so much feasting and revelry. Yet, being farming folk all, who live depending more on the influences and changes of earth and sky than other men, had they done so there would perhaps had been an uneasy hush among them, with the meadows all full of tall grass ready for cutting, and the tender crops green in the fields. It had been a dull yet gentle-seeming afternoon; yet within the last hour had come a brooding, ominous quiet in the air, while the sky lowered with a heavy glooming, and animals, seeming frightened, either roosted still or had crept away to shelter.

Presently it grew very dark; a few drops of rain fell; then suddenly—with a moan down the valley, and a sound in the air as if of mighty spirits' wings rushing by—came the wind! There was a silence even among the young folk, who gazed at each other almost awe-struck.

"What is it?—*a storm?*—why, who heard it coming?" they cried.

But—as in the middle of questions and answers the open doors were furiously slammed, and the windows, which had been set wide for air, banged wildly to and fro—there was too hurried a running in the house to set all straight, for answers. Then the old folk, peering out at the trees that were bending and swaying before the fury of the blast, shook their heads and ominously recalled to each other what a "griat wind" this or that one remembered in such a year and the damage thereby done. All were anxious enough to be at their own homes to see what mischief might be happening; but, as old Berrington declared, "what was quickly come would be quickly gone—and only mad folk would start out in such weather."

So they all piously agreed to trust in Providence watching over their barn roofs, seeing themselves could not do so; and they settled

down to the cider and ale again with great resolution to make the best of the matter.

On a whisper from Blyth, who himself slipped outside, Joy likewise led off the dance once more. In a few minutes afterward no one in the Red House seemed much heeding the storm.

Blyth was busied outside putting things safe in the farm-yard, meantime, for a quarter of an hour. The last of a winter rick of hay was caught up and whirled spirally aloft before his very eyes, seeming scattered among the tops of the oak-trees. He could not save it, and was glad enough to hold fast by a fence.

"Talk of cyclones in the tropics! this is one, sure enough; and I have now seen several," he said to himself.

He went back to the kitchen door, and was just entering the house when he heard a gasping cry in his ear, as of some one who had lost all breath, and felt a hand on his arm. Turning, he saw Rachel Estonia in her long black gown, her face looking deadly white under her hood.

"Help me! Magdalen has escaped from the cottage—a little while ago! It was in one of her attacks. It never happened before," she uttered, with difficulty. "My sister broke away from me and got out in the storm. I have tracked her so far, but I am lame."

Blyth knew she had hurt her foot.

"I will come—let me only tell Joy."

"Yes, yes! Tell her to come too; say that her mother may be lost or drowned. Follow me."

And without further pause Rachel limped away in the storm. Blyth dashed into the Red House. He came into the parlor by a little passage door leading from the kitchen, and caught Joy just as she was beginning a new dance with Steenie Hawkshaw.

"Joy, stop! stop! I want to speak with you."

"It was your dance, I know, but as you forgot it, and kept me waiting so long, I am going to dance it with Mr. Hawkshaw," pouted Joy, giving him an unspeakable flash of her luminous eyes, then scornfully turning away in the pride of her fresh young beauty.

Steenie gave one glance of smiling disdain at his rival, which at any other time would have maddened Blyth's veins, and he put his arm round Joy's trim waist. But Blyth caught her arm hard, grasping her soft flesh almost fiercely indeed, as he raised his voice above the twanging of the fiddles close by.

"I don't care about the dance, but I must speak to you. I have a message—*your mother!*"

Low as were the last two words in her ear, Joy heard, and disengaging herself from Steenie with a quick gesture, bidding him wait, stood beside Blyth alone in the passage in a moment.

"What is it? It must be bad for you to speak of her at such a time," she said, quite pale.

"It is. She had one of—of her fits" (he could not frame it better, "and she has escaped.")

Then he hastily explained matters.

"Oh, quick!—come quickly, Blyth. We must go and search for her. Will you come with me? You will; won't you? But no matter!—you can stay with your guests, and amuse yourself; I can go alone."

Thus cried Joy in the heat of some foolish feeling against Blyth she could not have described. And yet what had he done amiss, poor fellow, but not come to claim her last dance? and that now he stood still, as if thinking one moment—no more.

“Where do you want to go? and, if you want any one, *I* am here, Miss Haythorn,” said Steenie Hawkshaw at her elbow that instant.

“Yes, yes; come. Oh, it is a poor soul out in this storm; lost perhaps—and wandering on the moor.”

“But who is it? And why should you go?” cried the young man.

“Never mind. You are not wanted, Hawkshaw. I am going; and that will be enough, without any more help,” roughly interposed Blyth.

But Joy, with a little cry from her inner spirit that just reached their ears, was out and away into the storm as she was, in her thin dress of gay-flowered cotton. Hawkshaw, partly to oppose Blyth, partly from being really enamored that night, rushed after her without his hat. Blyth saw them both go, but himself strode back into the house.

As it was midsummer, though night had almost come during the dancing, yet it was not dark over the earth, even though the storm had brought with it a lowering of the already gray, overcast sky. On such June nights there is always a glimmer of light—even at the darkest, before dawn; so that as Joy sped onward down the lane—thinking of nothing, knowing nothing beyond that Rachel and her mother wanted her—she could still see her way, and some distance ahead.

The storm was terrible. It roared around her as if the element was all alive with anger and malice from its skirts, that still troubled the hills behind, to where its fore-front blew, in wild spiral curves ahead, scattering ruin and fear on its path, unroofing houses, breaking down chimneys, and even walls, tearing up trees. The bushes bent like whip-cord before the blast; the trees on either side the banks of the lane ached, groaned and swayed as in mortal pain.

Joy felt herself torn along as a thing of naught, her human force availing nothing against this vast, senseless power which no appeal could touch. She seemed to be in a gray, whirling world, where nothing was firm but the ground under her flying feet. The very stars seemed to reel and swim in the rack of gray cloud overhead. She was so fleet of foot that in a few minutes she was far down the lane, and had already begun to think she was alone, to be sadly frightened, not for herself, but for her mother—her mother! Oh, that poor, distracted soul! What if they *never* found her! Men might help—but where *were* they? She was alone! What was that ahead?—a spot of blackness upon a path crossing the flat of gray, open meadows. It was struggling forward with difficulty; Rachel Estonia without doubt.

Joy saw her Aunt Rachel was in danger of being blown down, and shouted her loudest to give promise of help. Oh, where were Blyth and Steenie? How had they the heart to desert her?

“Hullo, wait a bit—I am here!” called Hawkshaw, now coming up behind her. “I missed you coming out of the gate, and took the wrong turning. You run so fast!—but, I say, what does it

matter to you who is lost to-night? Do come home; this is sheer madness."

"No, no, no!" she only replied, running on.

"Here am I, too, Joy," said Blyth's voice, at her other side. "I have brought you a cloak. I waited to bring it, and some other things—which might be necessary. And, Hawkshaw, here is a hat."

Both would have thanked him, doubtless, but at this instant there was a strange sound just a yard before them. A great elm was swaying and straining before the blast, which had caught its head, as if wishing to lift it to heaven by the forelock. It creaked, it groaned. Both men instinctively sprung back, pulling Joy with them, whose knees quaked. Little wonder! for the next instant, with a loud crash, down came the great tree that had known the storms of a hundred years blow over it unmoved, and fell prone across the lane, low in its mightiness, its torn, twisted roots upturned toward the sky. Another few steps nearer and its spreading branches might have caught, and, if so, must have killed them.

One second or so all three paused, and while Joy trembled, thanking Heaven in heart for their preservation, even the two men felt that death had been very near them.

"Come on—come on," said Blyth; then wrapping a cloak round Joy as he drew her forward, "You are safer out of this; and there is Miss Rachel ahead."

"Yes, yes; let us hurry," she acceded; and they clambered over the fallen tree, even while Hawkshaw cried,

"What! one of the *wisht sisters*? Surely you are not mad enough to trouble yourself about what happens to them, and on such a night?"

"Be quiet!" uttered Joy, in a choked voice. "You do not know how good—how dear—they have been to me."

And Blyth replied in his deep voice, from the other side,

"If it were only a sheep or a heifer in danger you would save it, as would any man. How much more a woman—and a helpless soul besides."

Now they were beside Rachel Estonia, whose breath had almost gone. She felt as if she would have died there in the field, but that Blyth held her up till they came to the shelter of a hedge, when luckily the storm lulled somewhat.

"Magdalen is in front—I saw her. She had stopped for shelter, but when she saw me she ran on and on by this path."

"To the black country!" cried Joy, aghast; for so, with inborn love of beauty in nature, she had named the wild and boggy part of the moors, which she hated.

"To the old bridge over the Blackabrook!" exclaimed both men at the same moment; and Hawkshaw added, "She'll never cross it alive. But is she wrong in her head? What is the matter?"

Blyth saw Joy's young face wrung with pain, as she bent it before the wind and put up her cloak as if to hide it; and the horror in Rachel's eyes, though she held up her brave dark face and never flinched as they hurried on. He whispered a few words of explanation in Steenie's ear, who, though still hardly understanding why they should be running madly through the storm and night after one of the witches from Cold-home Cottage, yet became silent, looking

often sideways at Rachel, whom he had never seen near before, with a growing feeling that this strange woman was unlike any one he had ever hitherto met; and of a different class, too, surely—though what he knew not.

It was two miles to the old bridge, yet very soon, almost without a word spoken, they found themselves nearing it. Rachel's foot, which had been lamed by a thorn lately, was swollen to agony now. None knew how intensely she was suffering, though they heard her labored breath coming in great sobs. Blyth, supporting her on his strong arm, almost carried her on; but though once or twice he entreated her to stop and rest, while he should hurry forward and certainly find her sister, she only shook her head and redoubled her efforts.

"No; Magdalen would be frightened at any one but me."

Meanwhile Steenie was taking charge of Joy as if she were his own property. He drew her cloak constantly about her when the wind blew it back; whispered to her; kept close by her. Blyth saw it all—but it was no time to take heed of that.

Once or twice Joy fancied she saw—Rachel certainly saw, with her marvelous keen eye-sight—a something fitting mysteriously ahead, like a spirit of the storm. As the path wound round the hills this form disappeared behind corners, or was hidden by rocks and bushes ahead. Both felt as if living in a nightmare—an evil dream. It seemed such a terrible eldritch thing to be out in such a storm, pursuing a barefooted, lightly-clad creature over the hills; a mother—a sister—who with frenzied brain was flying from those who loved her best.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"The fit's upon me now!
Come quickly, gentle lady:
The fit's upon me now!"

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

THE path sloped steeply to the bed of the Blackabrook, which, only flecked with sullen foam at a few deep eddies, flowed dark and turbid from its parent morass among the most gloomy and savage hills on the moors. Below, an early British bridge, of which some few still remain thereabouts, spanned the stream. Huge piers of blocks piled flat upon each other, without mortar, had been placed, it seemed by giants, in the current, across which four far greater slabs of granite were laid in succession. Four only, without hand-rail, made this Cyclopean bridge; and the wind was howling down the valley, and the water flowing black and deep.

Across the river were old, deserted tin mine workings in the dreary hill-side. Where was Magdalen? They could not see her as they gazed down.

"A ghost—look, look, by the cross!" cried out Hawkshaw, suddenly, pointing above the path on which they stood, being now half-way down its steepest and narrowest part.

An old granite cross, of which many were scattered over the moors, was overhead in the heather, outlined against the sky; and by it a white figure was making wild and frantic gestures, peeping

from behind the cross, flitting round it by starts like a child at play, waving both arms on high, cowering down.

Seeing itself perceived, as they stood still consulting below, a wild shriek of laughter rang in their ears. Then springing forward to the verge, Magdalen caught hold of a large loose stone that was piled among others in a "clatter," and exerting all her strength hurled it down upon Blyth Berrington, who stood a little apart from the others. The big stone in its descent struck violently on a lower, projecting rock, and so, bounding off, passed over Blyth's head, though so close, all thought him killed for an instant.

Joy gave a scream of terror, and rushing to her old playfellow's side, regardless of more danger, threw her arms about his neck. Rachel called out, in piteous entreaty,

"Magdalen! Magdalen!—it is I! Hear me; let me come to you," and was even already climbing up perilously to the cross.

But only a maniac shriek came back in answer on the wind, for Magdalen was flitting down from crag to boulder like one of the pixies still feared on the moor, and meant to reach the old bridge before them. She leaped down, and fled on and on where no path was, through heather and bracken, a white, weird form, seeming a spirit, or, if human, a possessed being.

"Let me go, dearest," said Blyth, low and very gently, as he looked in Joy's horrified dark eyes. "I must prevent her from crossing the bridge—there is not a hair of my head hurt."

He himself unbound the imprisoning arms he loved so dearly, and would have kissed Joy's hands but that Steenie Hawkshaw glowered at him behind, with hate and anger in his face. Then Blyth darted down the path to the river, the others following him.

When the latter reached the banks, however, they saw he was too late. Magdalen was already half-way over the terrible bridge. Through the gray night they could see her long, fair hair blown out on the wind, that howled and swept down the blackness of the valley. Her little bare feet tottered pitifully over the narrow foot-way; her arms were spread out, as if seeking a hold or safety where none was; and her body seemed to cower and quiver, they fancied, even at that distance, either from cold in her light night-gear or with fear. For the Blackabrook was rushing close beneath her fierce and deep, with a sound of evil joy as it swished round the rude, stone-piled piers, as if telling how greedily, how quickly, it would suck in this woman's poor, frail body, and whirl her down in its course—drowned!

Blyth stood still at the near side of the bridge. He had his coat off, and was watching.

"I dare not follow yet, lest she should be frightened, and fall in. If that does happen, I will try to save her—you will find brandy in that pocket, if it should be wanted," he said, in an ordinary quiet voice, to Joy and Rachel.

Then, as both women marveled at his self-possession, he added,

"She is almost over now; almost—quite safe. Is it not like seeing a wraith crossing over the Styx?—Ah! *what is that?*"

Blyth had supposed safety too soon. With a wail of terror Magdalen started back, even as her feet almost touched the opposite

shore of the dark, wild land of shadows beyond, which seemed to promise freedom to her hunted body and throbbing, distracted brain.

Out of the darkness, under the hill rising from the river steeply, she now descried a herd of horned heads blocking her way, moving, tossing, transfixing her with curious animal eyes. A troop of half-wild cattle had been sheltering, huddled under the lee of the bank, and attracted by the strange spectacle of a white object, were now shuffling each other, and crowding round the bridge end and down to the water. Looking back despairingly, and seeing the group of persons at the other end, through the dim twilight not recognizing friends, Magdalen's overtaken powers gave way. She stopped short, turned giddy, then threw up her arms and fell fainting on the rough granite bridge with a low cry. Her body swayed sideways in the fall, so that her head and the upper part of her person overhung the water, and, being dragged downward by its own weight, they saw her gradually slipping over into the stream.

Joy screamed! and was then only conscious that she was fast held and struggling in strong arms. Her Aunt Rachel was holding her back by force to prevent the girl throwing herself into the water. She saw Blyth and Steenie rush forward—

The two men rescued Magdalen. Blyth it was who first jumped into the black swirling water, almost as soon as he saw the white body slip over before his eyes. But though a strong swimmer he might hardly have saved the helpless woman and himself without Hawkshaw's aid, who, wading out to where Blyth and his burden were swept against a rock, helped both to land. They carried Magdalen's senseless and dripping white figure back over the old bridge to where Rachel and Joy waited them. Luckily there was a shepherd's cottage near belonging to Farmer Berrington, where Blyth's authority induced the startled shepherd's wife to let the poor creature be put in her bed and tended by Rachel and Joy. But Blyth started to return to the Red House as fast as he could, and bring back the spring-cart; for Rachel, seeing the sufferer was regaining consciousness, though still terribly exhausted with her mad chase, was anxious she should come to full recovery with only the familiar objects of the cottage round her, resisting Blyth's most urgent entreaties to take her to the Red House.

"Will you come with me, Hawkshaw?" then asked young Berrington.

But Steenie hesitated, and made a sullen answer. He had run enough to-night after a crazy woman, and thought he would now take the cross-road leading homeward. Blyth might tell his old father to pick him up with the gig half-way at the "Black Bull."

"As you please," said Blyth, hesitating too; then, overcoming dislike of his rival's manner, added, generously, "I am heartily obliged to you, anyhow, for coming into the Blackabrook after us. It was cold work—shake hands."

Hawkshaw shook hands. Then, when Blyth Berrington strode out of the hut, the other went to the door of the inner room, and softly called Joy. The girl came out, looking still flushed and bewildered.

"I am going—good-by!" he said, looking closely at her with a searching expression.

"Good-by; and God bless you for your help to-night," she said, gently, still feeling as in a dream.

"Is that all the thanks you have for me, after running such a fool's race, besides wading up to my waist in the Blackabrook this beautiful summer's night?" Steenie said, sarcastically. "You near enough kissed Berrington without his asking just now, for doing no more."

Joy drew back, and her eyes blazed at him.

"How dare you?"

"I do dare. What is more, as I have courted you before all the other girls in the country, I think I have a right to know what this mad witch we have been hunting to-night is to you that you should be crying over her and kissing her, when we brought her out of the river. It is too much, Joy—I can't stand any more of that."

"It is not too much, sir. She is my mother!"

"*Your mother!*"

Steenie Hawkshaw made two steps back, staring, then gave a low whistle, and slowly uttered,

"And I who had meant to ask you to-night to be my wife! I thank you, Miss Haythorn, for undeceiving me in time."

His face, voice, and the manner in which he now bent his head low in mock respect, were so insulting and sarcastic that Joy felt her little hands clinch, while her figure seemed to grow taller and swell with pride and just indignation. The words rushed to her lips, "You would have asked me in vain!" But truth restrained them. An hour ago—one little hour!—would it indeed have been in vain? She raised her hand imperiously, and pointed to the door—Steenie Hawkshaw's eyes feasting even then with coarse enjoyment, yet vindictiveness, on her beauty.

"Go!" she said; no more.

And he went.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I think the sky calls living none but three:
The God that looketh thence and thee and me;
And He made us, but we made Love to be."

MORRIS.

MIDSUMMER eve. What a warm, what a soft, what a sweet night it was!

A day of wild, driving rain was over, and at evening the sun had burst out for a last hour of glorious, reviving beauty. And now, at night, the moon looked down on the fair landscape of the Chad valley, which seemed steeped in a haze steaming up in incense from the grateful earth, exhaling in fragrance from the flowers—the honeysuckle and carnations—that had kept their sweetness pent in all day. The lush-grass, so lately bent low, was raising its green banners imperceptibly once more; the shaken flower-blossoms, the heavily wet-laden leaves felt free again; and the nightingales were singing passionately down in the hawthorn brake by the running river, which sung, too, in a low, full gurgle. And across the river was the moon,

rising over the opposite hills, just touching with its beams the softened outlines of trees and bushes on which the dew gleamed like a woolly, shining pall. There was not a harsh outline, not a discordant note or sound that night in the whole world—the world of these two people.

Blyth and Joy stood together in the dusk in the shelter of the linn-hay, where it was dry underfoot. The ground in front was carpeted white with torn petals from a tall rowan-tree, whose blossoms overhead were even now sending out their strong scent on the night air. Close by, a wicket-gate led into the farm garden, where a thousand other sweets mingled with those of the wilder trees and bushes that loved the open moors. In-front of the pleasant shed, with its moor-stone posts and thatched and lichened roof, the meadow sloped gently to the river. Such was the scene, the little world that held these two, who asked nothing beyond.

Joy was standing with her head on Blyth's breast. His arms were round her. It seemed to both that the climax of their lives had come, the highest point at which they seemed nearest heaven.

"Oh! Blyth, Blyth," murmured the girl; "oh, dear Blyth, I must have loved you best all the time! I did love you best always. I must have been dull, stupid, blind, indeed, not to have known it the first moment I saw your face again."

Blyth drew her still closer to himself, and did not speak, because his lips were laid on hers, that were soft and sweet as the leaves of a rose. At last he said,

"Dear, be glad you had not such heartache as I had these last three years while I was away."

And in the pauses of their sentences they could hear the nightingales singing of a gladness that was almost pain; of a pain that was the ecstasy of passion over-filling the beings too small, too poor, too earthly, to express rightly such supreme rapture.

"Blyth," said the girl, softly, "I cannot help thinking, what will my mother say? She was so ambitious, poor soul, for me. Oh! why can one never feel *pure joy*?"

"Earth might be too like heaven, perhaps; we could not resign ourselves to leaving it," said Blyth. Then he gave a silent laugh that shook his body, not unlike his father; and Joy wondered what this meant till he said, "Forgive me, darling, for not having told you something sooner that may please—your mother. To you it will make no difference. See here, you know that as regards old family there is not a squire all round the moors whose land has been owned as many hundred years, from father to son, as ours. But though we are only simple farmers, for all that, still I have come back a rich man from Australia; even very rich compared with those around us."

"Blyth! is it true? And you never told me!—but there, say nothing; I am glad you did not. You know now I could not love you better or feel more proud of you if you owned all the moors round down to the sea."

"I do know it, my love. I always trusted you to be true and honest, whether I was rich or poor; but, if you had known it, so might others, and it was best you should not be influenced."

(Had Blyth been so sure always as now that gold has no weight

in woman's mind? Well, he believed so; so did Joy. Ah! happy, happy souls, they did right to believe the best of themselves; it helps us all to do the best.)

"You mean my mother. Yes," said Joy, thoughtfully. "But oh, Blyth, think of Aunt Rachel; how happy she will be! I wonder what they are saying now."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Non, l'avenir n'est à personne!
Sire! l'avenir est à Dieu?
A chaque fois que l'heure sonne,
Tout ici-bas nous dit adieu!
L'avenir! l'avenir! mystère!"

VICTOR HUGO.

WHAT *were* the two sisters in the brown thatched cottage saying to each other at the same hour that night, even while the lovers stood in the dusk together?

Magdalen was crouching by the embers of a low fire, for, though the night was so warm and still, she shivered; and yet again she said she needed air, so the door was set ajar into the porch. The nightingales were singing even more loudly up here in the glen, making the heart of one of the two sisters ache with an old pain. The lantern burned as ever of nights in the window-sill, with the red curtain drawn behind it.

Magdalen, strangely, on recovering consciousness after the terrible adventures of the night of the storm, seemed, though weak, to have come to her full senses again, but to have utterly forgotten what had passed. Sometimes she would look with a sort of musing wonder at her wounded feet and the scratches on her arms—seem surprised at her own great exhaustion of body. But she never said a word of the matter, nor did Rachel.

Now Magdalen, as she rocked herself to and fro, crooning the words of an old ballad, broke off impatiently, and said,

"Rachel! Are you listening? I wonder why I feel so restless? All this spring I have felt as I never did before—as if I were always waiting, waiting. First it seemed to be for Joy to leave school at last; but that point passed, it goes on and on within me all the same. Do you hear?"

Then came a low sigh from the dark figure, knitting, with unwearying mechanical fingers, in the dull red gloom.

"Dear, I always hear you—I always listen."

"Then tell me what it means," went on the plaintive voice, with a dissatisfied sound of longing, like a wail in the words.

"When will the end come, and what will it be after this weary waiting and waiting? Do you think?" (speaking low) "it means that this is waiting to see *him*—that he will come some day? I have always felt that we should see him again, you and I."

Rachel shuddered, and felt as if a stab had just been given to her heart, but controlled herself and kept silent.

"He will think me faded and withered," went on the poor self-tormented soul. "Rachel, *you* are handsome still. It is not fair! For, after all, I was far prettier than you as a girl, and I am so very

little older. If he did come back, he would still care most for you. Oh, it is dreadfully wrong still—after all these years!”

“But think of Joy—think of your own young daughter, dear Magdalen. Surely any father, seeing her so lovely, would love you if he did come.”

(Ah! poor Rachel, how troubled was that if! She was such a strong woman, both in mind and body, and her years since *then* had been so still and unchangeful, it seemed as if what had once grown in her heart would never quite die, so as to be forgotten and clean out of sight. No, as a dead tree still stands to tell of what has been, so was it with this memory in her heart.)

“He would love you best—he *must!* for her sake and your own, too,” repeated, unfalteringly, the lips that trembled unseen of her who had been, unwittingly, her beloved sister’s rival.

“Love me! And of what good would that be now, so late, except to revenge myself? Yes!—yes, I should like that. Revenge is what I want still. Besides,” added poor Magdalen, musingly, “if he came and asked me to go back into the world and society again, it might not suit me just now, with Joy likely to be well established in life. One grows used even to this hermit’s existence and our crusts of bread in the wilderness; and when she is married to young Hawkshaw, and living at the Barton, I should like to be near, of course.”

Rachel became sick at heart; for the fear had been pressing upon her all this day that now, perhaps, they must indeed perforce leave the glen and hills and the shelter of the poor moor cottage. Ever since the night of the storm, all the guests who had been enjoying the hospitalities of the Red House Farm must know why Blyth Berrington and Joy had left the dance in such haste, and the news would have spread of the night-chase after the mad woman. Then the village children would know of it, and come up to beck and point at the silly woman at Cold home; perhaps call out foolish, jeering words she might hear. For since the days of Elisha the prophet, so out of the mouths of ill-taught babes and sucklings such words of evil, soiling innocent lips, will be heard.

“After all, Joy may not marry young Stephen Hawkshaw. She may prefer my favorite, Blyth Berrington.”

“He is not so rich—the other is called a squire; and Joy has gentle blood in her veins.”

“So has Blyth Berrington—on his mother’s side, at least; while the Berringtons have done yeomen’s service since the days of Athelstan. Steenie Hawkshaw’s mother was a gypsy, they say, and his father is a drunken churl. Oh, my dear sister, the money at the Barton may flee away as on wings, but young Blyth has a heart of gold, and he adores our child.”

“No man is really good, Rachel; or not good as women are. Perhaps the best among them may think of God before themselves. But women come always last in their thoughts, believe me. Men will say otherwise; but it is not the woman, but their own love for her they think much of. Besides, how should Joy be happy? Are not the sins of the fathers visited on the children?”

There was a silence in the cottage for some time. The lantern

glimmered red, the embers glowed; out-of-doors one could hear the Chad running in the dusk; and still the nightingales sang.

A long, long silence.

Then a cautious but heavy step outside was distinctly audible in the small porch. There was a pause as of some one listening; next the door was little by little opened wider, and a man's figure stood in the door-way, bent forward in a crouching attitude. Both women felt their hearts beating hard with terror to suffocation; for even in that uncertain twilight their eyes had recognized the coarse canvas dress, cropped head, and striped stockings of a convict escaped from the great prison over the moors. By long habit each drew her hood far over her face; then Rachel, nerving herself, drew back the red curtain sharply, and snatching up the lantern on the window-sill, turned it full on the intruder's face.

It was *Gaspard da Silva*!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"Woman's love is hard to kill,
Lopp'd or felled there sprouteth still
Some small shoots of tender green,
To remember *what has been*!"

"MADRE de Dios!" muttered the convict, starting back at the flash of the lantern and at sight of the nun-like, dark figures which, hitherto, in the twilight of the room, his eyes had not been able to distinguish. "Are these little sisters of charity?"

There was perfect silence for a few moments in the cottage; then, recovering himself, Gaspard asked, in a rough, threatening voice,

"Is there a man in this house?"

Magdalen half raised herself from her couch, trying to shriek out, "Yes, several men. They will come soon; they will protect us." But her lips could not utter a word, though they moved; and it was Rachel's low voice that replied,

"No."

"Who are you both, then? Speak—are you dumb?"

Slowly came the answer. Rachel waiting for her sister, who still did not or could not speak; trembling and wondering if he would not recognize them.

"We are sisters. We live alone—and we try to serve God."

"Then you can serve Him by serving me now," said the convict, with an air of greater assurance at once, and a sound like an effort at a laugh. "I want some food—*food*. I have been starving all day and last night. Give me something to eat quickly, I tell you, or it will be the worse for you both."

At the hoarse, horrible tone as of a desperate man, Magdalen cowered down closer on her bench, and hid her head among her cushions, seeming in a faint state. But Rachel hastily obeyed, and took out all the eatables in their scanty cupboard—little enough, excepting a loaf of home-made bread from the farm and some cheese. Gaspard did not wait till she had placed the food on the table, but snatching some from her hands began to devour it, tearing at it with his teeth like a famished wolf. Presently he dropped heavily on

the wooden chair she had silently placed for him, and taking up a knife and fork, ate on now more like a human being.

Rachel, watching him, felt the horror and repulsion that had first filled her heart change little by little to divine pity. Under those coarsened, degraded features, where the brute alone was now visible, and the soul seemed reduced to some faint spark within, almost overpowered, she yet recognized the traces of the former handsome Da Silva—the man of brilliant powers, who then had admiration, even awe-struck reverence, for all that was good and holy, but whose star seemed evil from his birth; ever unlucky, poor, noble, ambitious, and overmastered by his own violent passions.

When he had partly finished, Gaspard looked up and said,

“I was hiding this evening up there on the hills among the heather and stones, for I saw two peasants coming and I was afraid. They met each other, and pointed down here at the light, speaking of two witches that had lived in this cottage, and how one sister had gone mad last week and no one dared come near them. That is she, I suppose?” He nodded with brutal carelessness over toward Magdalen, who visibly shook, whether from rage or more sorrowful emotions.

Then, as no one answered, taking silence for consent, he added,

“Ah—so it is so. Yes; I thought to myself that is the house for me! Mephistopheles among the witches, ho, ho!” His laugh, that resounded strangely within the bare walls, had no ring of mirth in it. He still ate on till quite satisfied; next, looking up suddenly, said, “Now I am dead tired and am going to sleep; but you two must watch, for I may be tracked here. I have escaped from prison, and by G—d I mean to stay free this time or die. If either of you betray me, see here, I will cut your throats first, I swear, and then my own.”

He held up the knife with which he had just finished eating his bread and cheese—an old table-knife, sharpened to a point by long use—and with an air of bravado, yet something of former grace lingering in his mock politeness, bowed to the silent women, then stuck the weapon in his waist-belt.

Rachel could hardly restrain herself from speech. Her heart was full to bursting, her pulses beating like hammers in her temples with the pity, the agony of it all; her ears were already straining lest they might indeed hear the footsteps of those coming to drag this unhappy wretch back to the jail that was a living death. Words were rushing to her very lips! She longed to fling back her hood and cry out,

“Rest, poor hunted soul! You know us!—we, the women who loved you, forgive all the past; we will watch over you. No blind chance, but a divine guidance, has led you to us here at last. Only repent, repent, and God will forgive you as we do.”

But looking past Gaspard da Silva, as Rachel stood motionless like a dark statue, all her emotions hidden under her draperies, she saw that Magdalen had started, half raised from her crouching posture, with a wild glitter in her blue eyes at her husband's threat of murder. Her pale features twitched in an agony of fear as she laid her finger on her lips with a gesture imploring caution; then drawing her hood forward, that had fallen back in her fright, she sank down

again unseen by Da Silva, whose back was turned to her. At that Rachel's words of consolation and revealing utterance stood still like a swift river arrested. Magdalen was a wife; this was her husband. Who dare speak, if she would not have it so?

"You are quite safe; do not fear. You may trust us," she murmured, almost soundlessly, her voice being almost unrecognizable to herself.

Then she pointed toward the inner room, of which the door stood ajar, showing the truckle-bed on which the sisters were accustomed to sleep together.

"We two will sit up by the fire and guard you," she added, in her faint breath, like the wind rustling through dry leaves, for she was hoarse from emotion.

The convict paused with a slight awakening of curiosity. Till now his mind had only been full of the instinct of self-preservation—his chances of escape, his hunger and thirst and fears. But already freedom was beginning to revive insensibly old influences and habits, and he said,

"You are not a common peasant woman. Let me see your face."

But Rachel held her hood more tightly drawn down than before with her strong hand.

"I am not young nor handsome now. No one in this country round has seen our faces these many years. We have taken you in, and will take care of you; but—" Her faint tones died away.

"Some vow, I suppose. Who would have guessed religion played such pranks in this howling English wilderness?" carelessly muttered the Spaniard; adding louder, "Well, I can see you are telling truth, for that sister, for one, has gray hair."

With a harsh laugh he pointed toward Magdalen, whom he had turned to see, and one of whose long coils of hair had fallen loose on her shoulders. Rachel looked also; and for the first time seemed truly to perceive and know that her sister's luxuriant fair hair, she had so often admired, had slowly changed—that now *it was gray!* Magdalen's form shivered slightly about the shoulders and chest, whether from passion or suppressed sobs the other did not know.

But Gaspard went into the next room, and, not even pausing to kick off his heavy boots, flung himself on the bed, begrimed as he was with bog mud and damp moss-stains, after his wanderings and concealment all night and day on the moors. And soon the weary wretch was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"How strange it is to wake
And watch while others sleep,
Till sight and hearing ache
For objects that may keep
The awful inner sense
Unroused, lest it should mark
The life that haunts the emptiness
And horror of the dark."—PATMORE.

THAT terrible night the long hours passed almost silently for the two sisters. They sat close together, as for protection, over the low fire which Rachel fed at times to keep up vital warmth in Magdalen.

At first they had spoken together in whispers, but only saying what both knew—that Gaspard was a convict; that he was in hourly danger of being recaptured, and being sentenced to worse penal servitude; that it was terrible!

“Will you not tell him who you are before he goes?” asked Rachel, with an effort.

“I do not know yet. Don’t torment me, Rachel—let me think. He might only know of Joy to ruin her marriage or ask blackmail of her all her young life. Besides, as he called me mad and gray, *he might admire you still!*”

This last was said with such intense bitterness that Rachel bent her head on her two hands, and felt as if unable to bear it. Was nothing sufficient to atone then, in Magdalen’s eyes, for the wrong so innocently done? Not the sacrifice of Rachel’s life, the love and self-denial of every hour during days and weeks that had grown to long, long years?

Then she felt, after a few moments of this worst anguish of soul, a soft pressure of Magdalen’s body leaned close against herself, an arm passed caressingly round her neck, and her sister’s head laid upon her shoulder.

“Oh, Rachel, forgive me; you know I don’t mean it,” said the poor creature. “I am only mad when I say these things, so you needn’t mind me. If ever I get to heaven as I hope now, it will be your work, for without you I should have gone quite deranged these dreadful years, and so been ruined body and soul; because then I could never have repented of all my own old sins. But I have been better lately, have I not?”

Rachel said, tenderly,

“Yes, dear. I don’t mind.”

Her heart melted with affection as she looked down at the worn, delicate face beside her; at the hair still curling so prettily as it escaped from Magdalen’s hood, and in which, whatever Gaspard had said, fair streaks still mingled with the gray.

Rachel said truly that now she did not mind; for such a caress is enough to gain forgiveness from any woman who loves truly.

And after this both sisters had remained long, long silent. Inside the other room the heavy breathing told them that Gaspard still slept. At last Magdalen sat upright, and said in a whisper, as if she could bear some suppressed wish no longer,

“I must see him again. I want to be quite sure what he looks like now. Do not come, Rachel; I want to go by myself.”

Lighting a tallow candle, which she shaded carefully with one hand, Magdalen stole on tiptoe into the sleeping chamber. She stayed a long time, or what seemed so to Rachel, left alone with all her nerves strung to highest tension.

Magdalen was his wife. She had a right to go, but still— He was sleeping, for the heavy breathing could be heard through the open door; yet who knew that he might not awaken any moment?

But still—*but still*—this was not the vague fear pressing on Rachel, growing each moment to such heavier weight, she too could bear the suspense no longer; and, springing up in her turn, she followed her sister into the next room.

Only just in time—!

Magdalen was standing, bending over the bed, her eyes fixed on the sleeper's upturned face and exposed, brawny neck with a strange, self-horrified, yet magnetized expression. She held the light partly concealed behind herself with one hand; but the other, which had evidently withdrawn the knife from Gaspard's waistbelt, was slowly stealing toward him, while grasping the weapon with twitching fingers. Rachel saw it all in a glance, and said, softly, in her ear,

"Remember Joy! He is her father!"

Magdalen started so violently that she trembled all over, and she gazed helplessly in Rachel's face, as if imploring mutely that she might not be accused of meaning ill.

"Come away, dear; come back with me," murmured Rachel, low, taking the knife and light from those nerveless fingers, and leading her sister back into the cottage-kitchen.

Once there, Magdalen sunk down in a violent fit of smothered weeping, which Rachel did not attempt to check, believing it would best relieve her brain. She was right; for at last, when exhausted, Magdalen looked up, and was able to speak coherently, though interrupted still by occasional low sobs. She was weak, but again in her right mind.

"I don't know how I could think of such a thing! Oh, surely I could never have *really* done it," she repeated, shuddering. "It was not as if it was *I myself*, Rachel, but something seemed saying quite loud in my ear that Gaspard wanted to cut our throats, and that it would be kinder to stab him to the heart, rather than that our two lives, and perhaps Joy's also, should be taken—and then all seemed to grow red before my eyes, like blood!"

"I believe the devil does so tempt many persons, and that some evil spirit did really so whisper to you," returned Rachel, deeply moved with horror of sympathy, yet all the more strong and solemn in religious faith. "Oh, Magdalen, if the powers of darkness are so near us let us pray. We are told, you know, that by prayer alone we shall be granted help in an hour of need. Let us pray, dear, together."

"Yes, yes; pray that good angels may be sent to us instead," faltered Magdalen, looking round as though she could see the ghostly visitants she so dreaded beside her in the cottage. She knelt close to Rachel, shivering, who placed a protecting arm around her shoulders, and raising her own noble head with the grandly solemn yet simple look of a human being addressing the heavenly Father, whose omnipresence and actual presence there in the cottage, though unseen, she believed in, yea, as fully as ever her patriarch forefathers, who had spoken with God face to face in the desert—she prayed aloud in undertones of great emotion.

When, after long intercession and entreaty for Magdalen, for Gaspard, for herself also as a fellow-sinner with them both, during which her whole soul and heart seemed bared before her Maker, Rachel ceased—calmed and exalted as one whose petitions are granted. Magdalen, who had listened awe-struck, though weeping often in penitence, turned and kissed her.

Now her kiss was so rare that Rachel felt a great surprise; for Magdalen, while always accepting her sister's unspoken devotion as a matter of course, invariably expressed an almost whimsical distaste

to any personal show of affection between those who, living together, *knew*, she said, or ought to do so, of their mutual regard. She had often in this way rebuked Joy, whose exuberant nature, however, could not be so easily checked. And Rachel in her own heart had as often longed for some refreshment in her desert of that water which she submissively believed the closed well contained. For in things of the heart, mere spiritual faith without proof is apt to grow disheartened, and the plant that never blossoms seems no better than a dead stick.

"Rachel," Magdalen said, "I never have known, till this very moment, how much you have done for me all these years—nor what *you* really are! You have been my good angel. I have forgiven Gaspard now, all, with my whole heart, and I feel pardoned myself. I seem to feel so white and clean too by that forgiveness that, if I were to die at this instant, it might be a happiness to me."

"Dear," suggested Rachel, "let us show forgiveness besides feeling it. *His* pockets must be empty, leaving prison, and by sunrise he is sure to waken and leave us. We have money, let us put up all we can spare for him, and he will find it when he has left us."

"Yes, yes; but shall we tell him who we are? Advise me, Rachel; I feel as helpless as a child, and cannot think what is right, though I wish to do it. There is Joy—"

"Shall we leave it, as we prayed, to God's guidance?" said Rachel, staggered herself, for, alas, she now expected no late repentance, no good to Gaspard from such a revelation.

He would only insist, perhaps, on staying hidden in the cottage, and who could foresee the effect upon Magdalen. She repeated again, firmly, after short reflection,

"We shall be shown what is best to do; do not fear that. Now help me to get out our bag."

The sisters kept a little hoard of gold hidden under the hearth-stone. Hannah only, besides themselves, knew of this treasure, for it was the last of Rachel's small fortune, to be kept, in case of her own death, for Magdalen's use. The difficulties of putting this money in a bank, owing to their circumstances of life, had seemed enough to induce them to hoard it themselves like the peasants among whom they lived. Rachel, being strongest, lifted the stone by a contrivance she had made of first removing a brick from those that edged it, and so inserting her hand. The tilted hearth-stone showed a snug little cavity below, from which Magdalen eagerly lifted out an old-fashioned satin bag, embroidered in purple silks. Drawing up a stool beside Rachel, who was still on her knees by the fireplace, both sisters put their hooded heads together in whispered consultation, while Magdalen, opening the reticule in her lap, ran her slender fingers through a little glistening heap of sovereigns it contained. They could hear the young house-martins chirping outside under the eaves in the stillness as they two bent close side by side, for the dawn was coming.

"How much can we spare him? Let us give him all—all we can! for Joy will be rich enough when she marries," Magdalen eagerly murmured. "It is only yours, you know, Rachel, for mine was all spent by him—but you agree? Yes, thanks, thanks. *Ah! my God!*"

The words came with such terror from her lips, while her eyes dilated looking back, that Rachel quickly saw—oh, horror, Gaspard da Silva, just roused from sleep and stealing close upon them, his eyes still drunk with slumber, yet fixed with a savage, terrible joy on the gold, his brawny brown hand with its strong muscles clinched. There was a cry of entreaty! He heard not; understood nothing! Quick, blinding blows! a horrible, hopeless struggle as the women put up their arms helplessly to defend themselves. Magdalen, sinking, made by some inexplicable instinct—she could not have told why—a last convulsive effort to hold the bag that was being wrenched from her clinched fingers—

With a brutal execration the convict caught up the knife that still lay on the table by the lantern, where Rachel had placed them both, and aimed a blow that must have stabbed the poor woman at his knees, but that Rachel caught his arm. Half stunned herself, she yet averted the full force of the stroke, but it grazed her own neck and shoulder, inflicting a long flesh-wound.

“*Gaspard!*” she cried. The hood fell back on her neck, revealing her still beautiful face deadly white, in its setting of rich black hair. The murderer paused with his arm raised, and the muscles of his face yet working in the frenzy of a blood-thirstiness, and glared with fear as at a spirit-being. “Do you not know us? I am Rachel, and that is Magdalen, your wife!”

She pointed to where, on the floor, her sister had fallen almost insensible, her face also now visible, but like that of the dead, her long hair curling about her. Gaspard gazed at her, wild-eyed—back at Rachel.

“Witches! ghosts!” he cried, with a horrible curse. Then, still clutching the gold, he burst away from the sight of that pale face and those imploring arms—out of the little brown cottage under the cliff, and away into the chill and mists and coldly coming dawn on the hills.

CHAPTER XL.

“This æ nighte, this æ nighte,
Everie nighte and alle.
 Fire and salte, and candle-lighte,
And Christe receive thy sawle.

* * * * *

“If hosen and shoon thou gavest none,
Everie nighte and alle.
 The whinnes shall prick thee to the bare bane,
And Christe receive thy sawle.”

Lyke-Wake Dirge.

ALL the next day a lonely man was wandering, wandering over the hills, lost in a fog that covered the moorland far as ever his weary feet could stray. Sometimes, sitting down under the poor shelter of a bush—dulled—cursing fate and the life he still clung to, he would try to think. Which way had he come? Where was he?

With the dawn he had found himself at the topmost height of the Raven’s-tor.

The cold, white light in the east, stealing upward through the thin mists that veiled the world and sky, told of the coming sun. Down

in a deep, broad valley below him were huge, opaque clouds—one shaped like a whale, he thought, others like monstrous, woolly white animals. Up rose Phœbus Apollo, glorious in morning splendor, his beams warming the earth far and wide, and shooting at last into the valley below. At that gleam, as if obeying a master-spirit's summons, the huge white clouds rose slowly at once into the warmed higher air. Up and up, like enormous sheep crowding to their shepherd's call, they hastened, faster and yet faster.

Once more the beautiful, ancient myth was daily fulfilled. Indra leads forth his cows to pasture in the plains of heaven; moisture-laden at night, they will noiselessly sink down to rest, brooding near earth once more.

Ah! the sun was rising higher, with faint but revivifying warmth, on chilled human marrow and bones. "Poor Tom's a-cold!"

The man, crouched among the piled stones of the huge natural cairn aloft starts, hearing the black ravens solemnly flapping over his head, and looks up at them with haggard eyes. Why do they come there? For him—to pick his bones, if his pursuers, hunting the country far and wide, force him to stay hidden here in damp brushwood and bracken, hungry and wet for days, maybe, till his flesh rots, leaving only a skeleton lying in this cursed lair? Had he eaten food last night—had shelter? or was it all a wild, horrible dream, a nightmare? Perhaps yonder two black birds overhead were only those two witches watching him under another form! His heavy brain was bewildered, yet he told himself fiercely again and again that the cottage and those two he had seen there was all a dream—an illusion of the senses! Liberty had driven him mad.

Yet his pockets were heavy with gold. And ha! what was this? The full sunlight showed him specks of blood on his shirt; blood—hers, Rachel's.

Ah, God!—if there be a God!—fate, cursed fate! it was *true*, then?

Her own face that, after all these jail-years and memories of crime, had looked so sweetly up in his; her voice, her praying arms raised, and—*her blood*, hers, on his shirt!

The convict—for Gaspard da Silva no longer seemed himself after all these years in which he had not heard his real name in prison, or among his evil associates—bowed his head on his knees.

So had Rachel Estonia sat in that very spot on the desolate moor, how often in the by-gone years, but with what different thoughts in her heart.

At last, after a time, the man felt a perceptible sensation of chill, though the sun should have been rising and growing warmer. He raised his head. What was this? The sun no longer shone, except like a dull lamp, hardly visible through obscuring white mist. He started up and stared wildly round, but already nothing could be seen of the surrounding country.

A fog on the moors—he knew what that meant. Perhaps safety from his enemies, perhaps, perhaps, that he could not find his own way.

No thought of giving back the money that weighed down his pockets was even now in his mind. His only idea on leaving the cottage and betaking himself once more to the shelter of the hills was the instinctive fear that a hue-and-cry might be raised after him

for this robbery. If he could but skirt along the upper moorlands till nightfall, then descend and make his way to the nearest great town, where he might lie harbored among those who would shelter such as he till danger was past—

All that day, miles away in the lower cultivated country, the country-folk could see the fog rolling in swaths of mist on the moors, passing in great clouds over the hills, only parting at moments to close together in thicker curtains than ever.

It was a gray, mild summer's day with them; thin mists, the edges of the great fog, swept down to them at times, but still the work of mowing the hay-meadows went on. "A terrible day on the moor!" they would say at times, pausing to sharpen scythes and looking up afar. They little thought a man was wandering on those hills, lost, lost, lost! soaked to the bone, heavy with gold, but hungry.

In the late afternoon the sun made a brief effort, and piercing the upper stratum of vapor touched the highest hill-tops. Up one of these the wanderer was now climbing out of valleys and combs, in which the mist was so thick and blinding their nature and depth could be guessed by no man, while he had slipped and been bruised often on the cliff sides. Ha! aloft here it was pleasant at last. A man could feel warm and at ease almost but for the cruel hunger-pain gnawing at his vitals.

Gaspard stood in the pale sunlight and looked up at the mild blue sky flecked with cloudlets. Around him was a clearly-defined area of a few square yards, but on the shoulders of the hill the fog was like great wool-fleeces. He stared hard, with all his might, striving to discern some outline of the new country which must lie below his eyry, but in vain.

Close behind rose a tor, as on almost all these hills; but something in the shape of these rocks, like granite cheeses piled on each other, struck him as vaguely familiar. As he gazed, a slow flapping of wings sounded overhead, and two solemn black birds rose and sailed slowly away.

It was the Raven's-tor. He had come back to the very spot he had left that early morning! Then he blasphemed.

There was a chasm on one side of the hill, a sheer fall for the few yards he could see. He had half a mind to fling himself down there on the soft gray vapor that hid all horrors of the descent and have done with it all; but the gold that jingled in his pockets as he moved restrained him. He sat down under a broom-bush, every twig of which was coated with moisture, and pouring a glittering stream of coins through his fingers, gloated over them. He would still defy the world, buy life, liberty, pleasures—

Ah! Raising his eyes, he saw white, curving shapes rising like specters from the abyss full of mist below him. Were those women?—two women pointing at him with wan, long spirit-fingers. He trembled, and cold drops broke out on his brow. Then he laughed at his own superstition, seeing now it was only some faint breeze, unfelt here, that had stirred the vapor below. But the fog was rising surely—rising to rob him of his sunlight and warmth, and choke him once more with its cold, death-giving breath. There were ivy-trails falling down a wall of rock that jutted out to one side of the

chasm; he would watch them as a tide-mark. He waited; inch by inch rose the wavering mist, in slow smoke-wreaths, rising slowly, touching the ivy; falling—then rising, rising, creeping upward inch by inch, with merely a few mocking, deceitful ebbs again.

Night had come. There was no moon, and the faint twilight of early summer only showed a ghastly contrast of rifts of deep blackness in the moor valleys, alternating with steaming, rolling swaths of white mist. At last the man heard the welcome sound of running water as he descended a path that led to a river's bed. Surely he knew the spot; this was the ford of the Chad, and across there stood the cottage he had reached last night—but *this night there was no lantern lit there!*

It was too dark to guide himself but by the trees; yet he ventured himself hardily enough into the water, thinking that a second time he would go to the cottage at any risks, and see— The water became deeper and deeper, at each step. Still, surely he knew the look of the rocks to right and left. Suddenly he was carried off his feet; his strength left him, and there came a strong rush of water singing in his ears.

Striking out in vain against the force of the current, dashed in the dark against wet and slippery rocks that hemmed in every side, Gaspard da Silva found himself overcome in the depth and icy cold of the Deadman's Pool!

CHAPTER XLI.

"Shine! shine! shine!
Pour down your warmth, great sun!
While we bask, we two together,
Two together!
Winds blow south, or winds blow north;
Day come white, or night come black.

* * * * *

Singing all time, minding no time,
While we two keep together."

THE sun shone gloriously next day on the Red House meadows, where the haymaking was in full swing. The air was full of summer scents; there were jokes and mirth and cider passing down the ranks of the mowers, and among the women tossing the newly-cut grass.

It was such a day when the pure joy of living sends a thrill through the frames of those who can appreciate its subtle essence of delight; when the pain and sorrow and death in the world seem small things compared with the present full sense of *being*, and the more veiled belief in our background of mind that thus we shall continue to exist in spirit through eternity. Blyth and Joy stood together, watching the haymakers. In their new gladness it seemed as if, while they kept thus side by side, that they saw together and thought together.

"I feel so happy to-day, Blyth. It seems as if, almost, I had nothing left to wish for on earth," said the girl.

She raised her hands to screen her eyes from the sun, looking round with a heart full of love on the hills, some veiled in haze,

some basking in the noontide heat; on the cool, winding Chad among its bushes and poplars, and at the red farm-walls beyond the meadow, where the garden glowed with flowers.

"I have the promise of all I wish for; but still I should like to know what day you will make it all really mine," said Blyth.

Joy blushed.

"It is so soon— Oh! there, I think the father wants to speak to me."

And on this pretense she went lightly over the grass, thus hiding her slight confusion, to where old Berrington sat under the hedge, with his hands clasped atop of his stout stick. He, too, was supposed to be watching the men at work, but his eyes rested more often, with twinkles of sly satisfaction, on the young couple.

When Joy left him, Blyth's eyes and ears became free again to oversee the mowers; and so he heard old Dick remark, with a certain emphasis (Dick had already repeated the matter once or twice, but his young master had not heard him).

"And so hur had no lantern alight at Cold-home last night, do 'ee say? God gi' no poor crature has lost un s life, then, at the ford— Well, well, now! And it lit there for years!"

"What is that, Dick?" Blyth sharply asked, understanding that he was meant to take notice of the remark.

The men told him that there had been no light set in the cottage window by the wisht-sisters during the past night; some of the villagers coming back from a wedding had noticed it, and being afraid of the ford, because it was so dark that night, had gone round by the lower fields.

Blyth became thoughtful as he heard this.

"What is the matter? What are they saying?" asked Joy, tripping back.

Blyth made a pretense so as to lead her away a few steps out of earshot of the men; then he said, with assumed carelessness,

"The river was very full last night, and there was no moonlight. They hope that no life was lost; that is all."

"How silly it seems to believe, as they do, that some one is sure to be drowned in it every year. And yet how often it *does* so happen!" cried Joy, referring to an old moor superstition. Then clasping her hands behind her head, and looking down at the little river on whose banks they stood, she sang whimsically the old couplet,

"Chad! Chad! river of Chad!
A dead man's body maketh thee glad."

The river flowed with a laughing ripple by the hillock on which they stood, those two young lives, full of present and hopes of future happiness. The clear water was lit by the sunlight till it seemed pure and limpid as innocence; its little eddies sparkled like smiles. Who could have guessed that only two miles higher up from this scene of healthy labor and sunlight and innocent gayety in the Red House Farm meadows there was a stark body lying at the edge of the Deadman's Pool, with eyes turned blindly to the summer sky?

Blyth now became somehow so ill at ease in his heart on hearing that there had been no light in Cold-home window the past night, that he soon made a pretext for stealing away from the hay-field.

Hastening to the farm, he found Hannah, and asked her to go with him to reconnoiter if all was right at the cottage.

"By good luck, Hannah, it is the day for bringing their basket of provisions. We can leave it at the Logan-stone; and if this is a false alarm, you can say we shall be working late in the hay-field, so it was easier to come at noon."

"We will so, Master Blyth. I'll have the eggs and butter packed before you can turn yourself round. Oh, dear heart! but I hope she's not taken worse, and poor Miss Rachel alone there, too," sighed old Hannah, with gusty sounds of fearfulness, as she bustled about making her utmost haste.

Helped by Blyth's able head and useful hands she was soon ready and on their way to the glen. Arrived at the Logan-stone, Blyth put down the heavy basket, which he lightly carried, at the accustomed spot. Then he advised Hannah to skirt the river-side by the path of the ford till near the cottage, which would have a less premeditated air of approach should Magdalen be looking out, and shrink, as usual, from human faces.

In this way, Hannah agreeing, they both passed by the Dead-man's Pool. Blyth afterward could never rightly explain to himself what uneasy feeling made him take a few steps through the bushes to look at it—perhaps only some impression or idea left by the hay-makers' talk. But on looking down at the pool, into which the water poured white with all the force of a mountain torrent that had been pent between narrow rocks till it burst out now as from a spout, and then whirled round and round in deep eddies, he started back with horror, for there lay close to his feet a *something* jammed between two stones.

At his exclamation Hannah hastened also to the spot, and both stood gazing in mutual awed silence till the old woman suddenly gave a long cry, and then, clasping her hands to her head, uttered, in a whisper of surprise and great horror,

"Why, Lord ha' mercy, *it is—it must be him!* Oh, to think of seeing my master like that after all these years—and I that never forgave him! He served the devil, and these are his wages. Lord have mercy on his soul!"

She sank back sobbing, and rocking herself to and fro.

"What do you mean, Hannah? This was a convict, you see. Surely you don't really recognize him as—as any one you knew?"

"Yes, yes, but I do. Convict or no convict, that is, or—God have mercy on his poor soul! that *was*, the Count Rivello, Gaspard da Silva."

Blyth, shuddering at the news, stood still, thinking; but then after a few seconds stepped down into the pool, and exerting all his strength brought the corpse out and laid it on the moss under the alder-trees.

"What has happened at the cottage—at Cold-home?" Come at once and see," said Blyth, cutting short the old woman's useless lamentations.

Quaking in her shoes as they reached the porch, Hannah knocked, calling out that it was she, with entreaty that Miss Rachel would speak to her a moment.

The door was ajar. A low sound came in answer, as of some one endeavoring feebly to answer them.

They entered hastily at that, stepping lightly and cautiously, and found Rachel lying on the settle, apparently very ill.

She roused up at their footfall, and raised her head.

"What is it? Magdalen has gone out," she said, faintly.

"Oh! Miss Rachel, are you so bad as that, and us never to know?" cried Hannah, shocked. "What has happened to you? What is it?"

"What has brought *you*? Has anything strange happened?" returned Rachel.

"Your face is all bruised and your neck bandaged," went on the old nurse. "Oh, poor dear! Was it Miss Magdalen?"

"It was *not* my sister. Don't ask me questions, Hannah—it was all an accident. What has brought you both? Tell me at once! I know there is some news—something. Go on—I desire it."

Hannah, who was hesitating and attempting, but failing always, to frame words, though her lips moved, began at last,

"It's very terrible. It's the worst, and yet it's the best news for us all. All things are ordered by Providence, and, if he had escaped free, who knows—I'm speaking of *him*, my dear—the count. Well, he must have been in the prison up yonder all these years, and last night—"

She stopped short. But it was enough. With a convulsive effort Rachel raised herself, catching at the side of the settle, as if hardly able to support herself. They then saw with mute concern that her face was deadly pale under her hood; she had dark hollows beneath her eyes, and an ugly bruise on one cheek.

"Have they caught him then? Have they taken him back to prison again?" she asked, in a hollow voice.

Hannah could not speak, and looked at Blyth, who answered more bravely, not supposing the news could touch Magdalen's sister with very deep personal feeling now, yet with reverent pity in his manly voice,

"He will never be taken to jail any more, Miss Rachel. You need not fear that—you need fear nothing now."

A spasm of pain that darted across Rachel's features startled him.

As if aware of it herself, she hastily drew her hood more forward, concealing her face. Then strangling a sob in her throat, she breathed, rather than said aloud, rapidly,

"He is dead? Tell me, quick, Blyth Berrington, how it happened; tell all, truly."

"He was drowned last night in the Chad, down there. I have just found the body," said the young man, unwillingly, yet forced to obey her.

"There was no light in the window," she moaned to herself, having at once guessed the whole truth Blyth would so fain have spared her. "Oh, fate! fate! Magdalen so ill; yet why could I not have roused myself to do that one act, if even I had been dying!"

She seemed unable to stand as she spoke, and a horrible fear came over both, as they saw her so ill; they suspected why she had been unable to guard over the ford last night, for the first time these many years. Blyth would have held her up with his strong arm,

but she motioned him away, and sunk back, as if utterly broken down. Hannah cried out,

“Oh, Miss Rachel, did he hurt you?”

“Hush! It was an accident. He did not know—” said Rachel, with a dignity that awed them. Then added, heavily, “Blyth, do you know who this man was?”

“I do. He was the father of the girl I love best in all the world, and who, I am proud to say, has just promised to marry me,” said Blyth, stoutly.

A gleam of joy flashed in the dark caverns of Rachel Estonia’s eyes.

“And this makes no difference to your feelings, *now*?”

“What difference can it make, but that I wish with all my heart to help you the more, Miss Rachel? I believe you like me—will you not ask Joy’s mother to look on me as her son—ask her to give me the right to help you both?”

“I will; indeed I will. None could better deserve her; our child—Joy!”

Alas! poor Rachel. But a few short days ago and Blyth’s news would have given her what she had not tasted for so long—pure happiness. It would have been a glorious sunburst through the dark clouds of her life. But now!—not even this could gladden her in the old way any more. She might verily have bewept her own fate for the pity of it, but she could not pause to think of herself, and only asked, with painful anxiety,

“Must the prison authorities be told that—that the body has been found?”

“I fear they must. But why are you so anxious now?” replied Blyth, not comprehending.

“They will take his body back to the jail, and bury it in a pauper’s grave, in that dreadful prison, without even a stone, perhaps, to mark his resting-place,” said Rachel, desperately. “Oh, Blyth, indeed he was once a gallant gentleman, before ill-fate and evil ways and associates brought him to ruin. Believe me, he was! Oh, try, try to have him spared this last indignity!”

She was weeping. Blyth was greatly moved.

“If I can by any means prevent it—if we, my father and I, have any influence in such a matter, it shall not happen,” said he, warmly. “There is a quiet corner of our own in the church-yard, just where the path comes down from the moor, and there we can make room for Joy’s father. I can promise nothing of course, but I swear I’ll do my best.”

“That is enough. And, meanwhile, where will you bring it?”

She looked, shivering, toward the window, and away out at the river where the green-wood of trees and bushes hid the something she dreaded, yet almost craved to behold.

“Will you have him carried to the farm, or—or here? Shall I go and see?”

She tried to rise, the strong woman who had never spared herself, but for once her power failed her, and her trembling limbs refused to obey.

“Don’t go, dear—don’t try,” cried Hannah, soothingly, with a

gush of tears, though Rachel was quite dry-eyed. "I'll see to it all, trust me."

"And trust me, too," said Blyth. "There is the old corpse-house beside the church, you know. I thought that would be best."

This was a tiny building meant to shelter the coffins which often had to be brought a long distance across the moors, and in olden days, when roads were fewer and worse, sometimes over-night.

"God bless you, Blyth Berrington," said Rachel, solemnly.

And then—then only, she fainted.

CHAPTER XLII.

"She came not, no, she came not home,
Though cold the night and black;
They looked out long, and looked out late,
A-down the forest track.
They waited long and wearily,
Dear saints! where can she be?
Just for one hour she rambled forth,
But never back came she."

RACHEL ESTONIA's strength always seemed "sufficient for the day."

She had kept up her energies till her last cares for the unhappy man she had so greatly loved were taken from off her feeble shoulders by Blyth's intervention. Then she seemed to slip away from earth, for a short time, into the gray land of know-nothing.

Blyth carried her into the next room, and laid her on the truckle-bed. Hannah chafed her cold hands, and sprinkled water on her face. Presently, as they watched her, while looking at each other and whispering their wondering fears as to what had passed between the convict and these helpless women, a little flutter of reawakening life moved Rachel's eyelids. Then she stirred as her spirit was heavily returning to take up its wonted duties in command of the body.

"Raise me a little. My head is so heavy—my neck is sore; the pain goes down to my heart. What is the matter?" she muttered. Then— "Where is the money? Did he take it all? Gold—that brings all evil! Ah! only for that he might have gone in peace."

The others started and met each other's eyes with the same questioning glance.

"Did he take the money from you, Miss Rachel? Did he rob you then of your little savings, after all?" asked Hannah, in a caressing, pitying voice in her ear.

But Rachel turned from her shuddering and in anger; she that was almost never so.

"He had the best right to it! We gave it—no, we meant him to have all he needed. Go home, Hannah, go back to the farm. You are very good, both of you, but I cannot talk, and am best left alone, indeed! I am used to it."

At that moment there was a quick footfall, and Joy, with her eyes shining and her cheeks flushed with excitement, appeared in the doorway of the inner room.

"Yes, they may go back to the Red House, but I will stay and

nurse you," she said, hearing Rachel's last words. Then she came and knelt down by the bed, putting her strong young arm under her aunt's head, who, turning, hid her face on the girl's shoulder with an utterly weary, yet now restfully satisfied air, that in her touched them all.

"Where is your mother? Child, you don't know all. Hannah will tell you."

"*My mother has told me all!* She came herself and desired me to go to you and nurse you. She wanted fresh air for a little while—and said I was to stay with you till she returned."

After a few minutes, Rachel being soothed, Joy, obeying Hannah's secret signals, slipped into the other room a moment. Blyth was waiting there, alone. He held out both hands to her and drew the girl toward him, looking pityingly into her eyes.

"Darling, I could not bear to leave you without one word, though I am going now. But there is something I must tell you that your mother does not know. Your father last night was—well, he was—"

"He was drowned down there!" said Joy, hastily. And Blyth now perceived that the flush on her cheeks burned still in scarlet feverishness, that her lips were parched, and her big, dark eyes dilated with a look of standing horror. "No, do not kiss me, now, Blyth. I can hardly bear you to touch me. I feel such an outcast. My brain is on fire; my heart is like a coal. I have no pity for him yet; but still, to die in his sins, almost a murderer!"

"Judge not," muttered Blyth, awkwardly. Then "How did your mother know he was dead?"

"She had gone down to the river for water, *then she saw it*. She came flying down to the farm to find me, so terribly excited she had not even put down her can, or emptied it, but ran with it full, and splashing over her all the way. How she frightened me!"

"My poor dear, you heard it all too suddenly indeed! Tell me—how did she take his death? Is she grieved, or only greatly shocked?"

Joy turned away her face, and almost wrung her hands out of Blyth's detaining grasp.

"Don't ask me, Blyth. At least I can tell you only this, that she was terribly excited and very strange in her manner—but there! she cannot help herself. Then we somehow spoke of you, and I said you would help us, and told of our engagement. Oh, Blyth, Blyth, she was so angry at that! It was too painful, and you who are our best—except your father—our *only* friend."

Breaking down, sobbing, Joy hid her face in her hands, but this time did not repulse Blyth, who put his arms round her slight form, shaken with violent weeping, but beyond a murmured word or two of brave hope, of tenderness, thought it best to leave her to herself.

In a very short time the sudden storm of grief was over, as was Joy's nature. Dashing away her tears, she whispered,

"Now, it is no time to indulge my nerves, is it? I must go back to that dear saint in there. I hope she hasn't heard me crying. Good-by, for the present, Blyth. You will go and do all that you can for *him* now, and I for her."

She slipped from his hold and was gone into the sick-room next moment, while Hannah as promptly hurried out and catching Blyth

by the sleeve before he could leave the kitchen, they held a short consultation in broken whispers.

The old nurse, who was in the secret of the hiding-place for the sisters' money, got Blyth's help to raise the hearth-stone, which was lying unevenly in its bed. As they expected, the hollow underneath was empty; the nest-egg vanished.

"How much was there?" asked Blyth, low.

"About three hundred pounds in sovereigns. They had it so, because it was easier to change in this part of the country than notes. Besides, Miss Magdalen will tear up any paper she sees when the fit is on her, while she likes seeing gold; so it was safer. They kept it in an old satin bag—their mother's reddycule, they called it, that for old sakes' sake Miss Rachel never parted with."

"It may be on the body still," said Blyth, with a momentary shudder of a version. "I will go and see."

But he found nothing after nerving himself to the necessary task. The coarse canvas jacket was half pulled from off the dead man's shoulders, perhaps had been caught on the rocks in his last struggles for life.

Blyth then waded into the dark pool, under the trees, and began a hasty search there in spite of the cold and the rushing strength of the river. The glitter of steel under water, close to where he had found the corpse of Da Silva, stuck fast, caught his eye. He pulled out the object. It was an old knife; the one Gaspard had taken from the cottage. Finding this loose, Blyth therefore concluded that the money had likewise been washed out of Gaspard's pockets by the current and force, and the position of the body. But he could not find the bag, although he waded all round the pool and probed its depths with a long alder bough he tore off one of the trees.

The sides and bed of the Deadman's Pool were all fissured with cracks and crannies among the rocks.

"No matter," thought Berrington. "If I can't find it now, no other persons are likely to do so. Only that it is Miss Rachel's little fortune, I would never grope more in this accursed spot."

As Blyth got out of the river, he saw two men at a little distance, coming down from the hills. They were shepherds, but were evidently shunning the accustomed ford and directing their way down the other bank of the Chad, which meant a longer road to the village. As Blyth hailed them, they seemed alarmed, and took to their heels, to his surprise. He started in pursuit, but only after a hot chase down a long meadow, and when finding he was gaining on them, did they stop and face round.

"Why, it be young Muster Berrington, *surelie*," said one to the other, slowly, breathing hard as Blyth came up with them; "us had our run for nought."

"Well, I won't have *my* run for nought, I promise you," said Blyth, who was cross and disposed enough to give them both a thrashing for their behavior. "What did you run like a couple of hares for, eh?"

They explained in a half-shamed but dogged way that there was a hue and cry of police over the moors. A desperate convict had escaped from the prison up on the hills. He had knocked down a warder with a big stone, and had nearly murdered him, when out

working with a gang of other prisoners; so the shepherds had felt scared of meeting such a desperate man; while also one of the sister-women at the ford was said to be gone mad and ready to murder anybody that passed.

"Who dared say such foolish lies?" asked Berrington, sternly.

The men looked at each other askance, but stuck to their belief.

Young Mr. Hawkshaw, it was, who had warned them the night of the great storm, when he met his father at the "Black Bull" where they were sheltering. He had stood them a glass all round, and told them of his chase after the lunatic, who ought to be shut up, he declared, and not allowed to run loose like a mad dog through the country. And so she ought—he was right—both repeated.

Blyth ground his teeth in silence.

Then he began to speak. After telling them there was no longer any fear of the escaped prisoner, for that he himself had just found his body in the Chad, he ordered them to take a gate off its hinges and help him to carry the dead man down to the Red House.

They demurred at first, but Blyth's temper was up; and he threatened to knock down whichever of them, or both, that dared oppose him—calling shame on them if they would leave the corpse of any human being, prisoner or free, exposed to the indecency of being attacked by flies in the wood there, before the police could come. As to the mad woman, whom they also seemed to imagine lurking in the bushes ready to spring out "like a wild cat and claw them," as one muttered, he reasoned and expostulated. Had not she and her sister lived in his father's cottage for years? he said; a little dazed at times maybe, she was still as harmless as he had known her from boyhood; and her sister was the best, the most gentle of women.

It was all in vain.

Only when he spoke of the lantern lit every night for the past fourteen years or so, to guide wayfarers safely over the ford, one wavered.

The other struck in that like enough it was only doing good that evil might come. All folk knew witches were powerless to cross running water; the Cold-home lantern might only be to entice wanderers over to the cottage side of the Chad.

Blyth became hopeless of persuading them; indeed, his blood boiled so that he felt too savage to use soft words in winning the men to his view of the matter. He had a rough temper, that only a good deal of self-control and hard work most days kept under. But he made the men obey his orders, nevertheless; and so, helping to place Gaspard da Silva's poor body on the improvised litter, he covered it reverently with his own coat.

Then, grimly remarking that he would carry for his own share as much as both the two other men, so there need be no grumbling, he made them raise the gate till he took up the dead man's head and shoulders on his own strong shoulders, and started for the farm at such a stout pace that the faint-hearted couple behind him, who were breathing hard and wishing to stop and wipe their faces, only did not call out for grace because of their manhood.

Blyth was proud, perhaps too proud, of his strength, and liked feeling superior thereby, which was better, after all, than purse pride, that accepts being fawned upon. He was bent on hurrying

the body away from the cottage vicinity, in order that the sight of the police authorities and gaping rustics should not vex the women there. Avoiding the hay-field, he succeeded in carrying his burden unseen into the farm yard, and placed it, with the men's help, in the empty apple-room, that was all clean swept, and, being flagged, was cool and sweet; then he brought a deal table from the kitchen for a bier.

After this, he gave some beer to the thirsty men, and, sending them off on messages to the police in different directions (rather against their grain, for they would have liked resting and drinking for an hour maybe), he hastened to find his old father among the mowers, and to break his news.

Farmer Berrington, though a man of such calm mood, was a good deal moved by the intelligence, owing to his age and state of health. Blyth did not like to put seeing after what was needful upon the old man alone, by going up the glen himself again like a love-sick swain. Besides, in another hour or so, his messages had reached the searchers, and the farm-yard was presently full of a small gaping crowd of the cottagers around, whom he had some ado to keep from getting into the apple-room after the prison-warders, to stare at the sight; failing this, they began gossiping with the servant-maids and farm-men, till Blyth turned all the intruders out, neck and crop, and locked the road-gate upon every one of them.

One big idler, who did odd jobs at the Barton for the Hawkshaws, tried to resist authority, till Blyth, suddenly catching him by a neat little wrestling trick, laid him low in the swine-trough; after which, the rebel's determination and that of his fellows vanished speedily. Murmurs reached Blyth's ears: "That young Berrington was not to be crossed since he had come back from Australia;" "that he was stronger than any two men, and for very little would up wi' his fist and knock any man's two eyes as black as a marnin' coach!"

"Turk or no Turk," responded a matronly female admirer, "he was twice the man his father was, although old George Berrington had been no fool neither in his day."

Whereupon, the tide of opinion turning (especially swelled by the farm-men, who were being sent back to work by their stern young master, after having deserted the hay without leave), the latter soon found himself looked on as a sort of Samson, feared as much as admired; whose late feats of strength were whispered round and much exaggerated.

And thus the hours passed, so that it was fully evening before Blyth could again set forth for the cottage up by the ford.

He went slowly now; for the last half-hour and more had been spent in a difficult and long parley, in which he had to use all his wits and weightiest arguments, both with his old father and the authorities, in order to carry out poor Rachel's wishes respecting the convict's burial. Old Berrington's feeling of sentiment stopped short there; or rather revolted at his own last resting-place being contaminated by such an unwished for neighbor. Only Blyth's private entreaties and the remembrance of Joy had reluctantly prevailed with the old farmer, after all.

It was weary work, but Blyth won the day, he believed, at last. So now it was a well-earned rest to go steadily, though not slowly,

and feel the sweet evening air blow on his brow as he trudged through the fields. Blyth was meditating what was now best to be done, because there was little room for four women in the Cold-home cottage, yet he could not think of leaving Joy alone there with her crazed mother, and Rachel so helpless; therefore must Hannah stay till some better counsel came to his mind, or the farm was freed from the dead presence there.

As Blyth neared the cottage which lay hidden under the shadow of the cliff, a figure came out from the porch, hesitated, looking back as if divided in mind, then ran swiftly toward him. He had recognized Joy, and the very flutter and lines of her gown, he thought, before he could really descry her face or outline; likewise she had guessed who he was.

She came flying up to him light as a wood-nymph, flushed, but only breathing a little more quickly than usual.

"Oh, Blyth, Blyth, where is my mother? Have you seen her?" was her first query.

"I have never seen her all day. Has she not come home?" Blyth retorted.

"No—no; not yet. Her last words to me were that I was to wait for her with Aunt Rachel till she returned. She was wearied of yesterday's nursing, of staying in the cottage, she said; she must ramble a little, but she would surely come back soon, and she made me promise to stay with my aunt, and take great care of her meanwhile."

"I will go and search for her up the glen to the waterfall," said Blyth, dreading evil in his heart, but speaking cheerily.

An hour later he returned—alone.

Joy met him again, still more anxious. Rachel was so ill and faint, she knew nothing of their anxieties, and the poor girl dared not leave her. Old Hannah had gone searching down the river's banks to the farm and back by the fields—in vain.

Magdalen had not returned.

Blyth Berrington, now thoroughly alarmed, hurried back to the Red House, got all the farm-men together as they were leaving work for supper, excepting Dick, who had gone to Moortown, and, with liberal promises of reward, raised a search-party that dispersed in various directions.

Some hours later he rode up, after midnight, to the cottage.

Before he could call softly, Joy herself slipped out into the porch and looked at him in the summer starlight. Before he could speak or dismount, she came and laid her head against good Brownberry's neck, who whinnied in greeting; then she softly cried.

"Don't get off, Blyth," she said, laying her hand on his knee, as he would have alighted to comfort her, if possible, though not knowing what to say. "I see you have no news. Something tells me we shall have none. If I could only go and search too—oh, it would be easier to bear! But you will try your best still, dear, for my sake, if not hers. It is all you can do for me."

Blyth did search his best that night with his men. He searched till the next day's sun was high, still uselessly.

Magdalen never came back to the cottage.

She had utterly vanished.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"They made a bier of the broken bough
The saugh and the aspen gray;
And they bore him to the Lady Chapel,
And waked him there all day.

* * * * *

"They dug his grave but a bare foot deep,
By the edge of the Nine-stane Burn,
And they cover'd him o'er wi' the heather-flower,
The moss and the lady-fern."—*Scottish Ballad.*

BLYTH BERRINGTON had proved true to his word.

The evening sun was sinking, three days later, when a little group stood in a corner of the moorland churchyard round a fresh-made grave, beside the sheltered spot under the lee of the hill where the Berringtons had been laid to sleep for many generations.

How still it was!

The service was over; the earthly body laid in earth; the grave covered in with the last sods. Yet old Farmer Berrington and his strong son remained standing bareheaded there and motionless in the golden low light. They could hear the sheep cropping on the furzy hill rising steep behind the little lonely church, while the wild bees flew droning past them on a last homeward journey, honey-laden, to their hives.

Down one of the paths leading through the yew-darkened, old, old wood—that had long ago hidden the little place of worship safe in its shelter, when the larger churches around were being ruthlessly demolished by Puritan emissaries—a vehicle could be seen driving away. It held the two jail officials come from the great convict prison away up in the heart of the moors.

Down the narrowing perspective of another path a solitary rider was departing. That was the hunting parson, who did hard work riding to this solitary little moor-chapel from his own larger church, some miles away.

"They're all gone safe now, boy. 'Twere no good to have raised gossip before," said old Berrington, quietly, to his son, as he stood leaning on his staff, a massive, immovable figure.

Blyth nodded; then, moving a step or two, he looked steadfastly up at the hillside above them, toward which his eyes had several times stolen unseen glances during the late solemn service for the dead.

There was a clump of yellow, waving broom thick on the brae, just where the path sloped most steeply down. Out of this thicket two figures now rose, one short and very stout, the other tall and slender as a young birch-tree. These were Joy and her faithful old nurse. Hand-in-hand, like spirits evoked from the heart of the hill at Blyth's signal, they rose and now stole down together; both dressed in decent black, but yet in no mourning that would attract notice.

Joy, poor child, came and knelt lowly by the fresh-turned earth, with her hands clasped in earnest prayer. Whatever her creed might teach, whether it was too late or not for intercession, she never

thought, but, following her feelings, prayed for the dead; the others, in reverence for her filial devotions drew a little away.

A strange mingling of shame yet pity filled the young girl's heart for the dead so near her knees, yet so far away now. Who knows where? A few feet below this red, broken soil on which her warm tears fell, only hidden by that and a wooden coffin from her gaze, lay the father whom she could not remember, whose face after death they would not let her see, in spite of her entreaties.

"Best not; I can tell you, dearie, how handsome he *once* was," Hannah had murmured.

"Oh, the pity of it all!" thought the girl, shuddering. She was so pale and altered in the last three days that the change was startling. She seemed not so much suffering from grief as looking infinitely older by the terrible experiences that had so suddenly assailed her in such a short time, all come like thunderbolts falling from a smiling sky, when her young happiness was at its height!

Her father an escaped convict, his chase, and Magdalen's wild hints of the terrible night in the cottage, that she could not keep from her child; the horror of his death; next, and worst of all her mother's disappearance—the agony of suspense as to her fate; lastly, that Rachel Estonia, who was dearest and nearest in heart to her niece of all women-souls she had known, lay still too ill even to guess at the cause of Magdalen's absence!

They had only dared to tell soothing evasions to the sick woman—that her sister had promised to return very shortly; that she wished Joy to do the sick-nursing in her stead. And this last seemed so natural to poor Rachel, in her long habit of unselfish devotion, which asked and expected no return, that she lay dreamily imagining Magdalen at the Red House, well cared for. But she roused herself to bid Joy, in a weak whisper, leave her to attend the funeral of the girl's father. And Hannah must go too; all respect must be paid. (Perhaps the inability to follow Gaspard da Silva to his grave herself seemed the last bitter expiation to the sorrowful woman of her great trial of life, which at times, looking back, seemed so terribly like a sin!)

So Joy covered her face with her hands now, shaken with pity, not so much for herself, but imagining the sorrows of those two women who had so long lived up yonder in the glen. Her mind, with pure daughter's instinct toward all three, as it were, glanced away from the early history of their lives (though guessing something of that troubled tale). But the later years rose before her; the unhappy madness on one side, the life-sacrifice on the other. The fears; the hard, poor manner of living; the loneliness, with so few or no other human souls of cultured mind or kinship in birth near—

It was all true. Yet whatever her sympathy, her own true grief for them, Joy could never equal, or even enter greatly into, the feelings of the two elder women for whom her young heart mourned with such aching pity.

What could she tell, this young, bright girl, of the days when they also had been young, and her father like a strange, bright, if baleful, star on their life horizon? What could she guess, even with help of love's imagination, of their secret pain and sorrow?

So little, it was almost nothing! Each heart truly knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy.

A voice startled Joy. Looking up she saw Blyth standing over her, strong and tall, with the living love in his honest blue eyes that gave her consolation and the sense of support even as her troubled gaze met his.

"My father and Hannah have driven away in the gig, dear. She could not walk back to the cottage. I will stay with you here as long as you like; but—do you not think the living needs you now more than can the dead?"

"You are right, Blyth; you are always right. Yes, I will go back to Aunt Rachel now. It was best for Hannah to drive, so I meant to walk back by myself over the moor-path."

"I thought you would do that; and so I meant to walk with you."

Silently Joy rose, checking a small smile that half broke on her lips; checking too an embrace that Blyth, suddenly moved by strong pity as he looked down at her bright beauty, so dimmed and down-cast, would have bestowed upon her. It was not the fit time or place. But she thought forgivingly to herself that after all a man was not expected to know better; so she softly nestled her hand into his large palm, and they went away over the hills together.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon,
How restlessly they speed and gleam and quiver,
Streaking the darkness radiantly! yet soon
Night closes round, and they are lost forever."

SHELLEY.

As they went back to the cottage over the sun-kissed hills, while the valleys lay in shadow, going along the very track the two sisters from the cottage over yonder had paced so often on Sundays, Joy leaned more heavily than usual on Blyth's arm. She had sat up the last three nights with Rachel, against Hannah's entreaties, unable to sleep with thoughts of her mother's fate. Her springy step was vanished. For the first time in her life she felt tired out in mind and body.

Both were silent at first; their thoughts oppressed by the late scene they had left. Then Joy's eyes began to wander; gazing over the swells of moorland to where in the heart of these, lay the dangerous quagmires and boggy grounds she had only heard of as impassable to human footstep.

"Blyth! could my mother have strayed up there?" she asked, pointing, and drawing nearer to him, with horror of the thought. "I feel as if I would like to go away yonder with you now, and search, and search till I dropped down, unable to stir—or till I had found her."

"Joy, my dearest, you would not find her there. Our men are still searching; but, if alive, she must have wandered further. If not—"

He broke off; but the poor girl understood the remainder.

If dead, those greenly treacherous bogs up yonder never gave up their prey; but the sundew would blossom, and the cotton-grass

wave over their pitfalls as if no harm to any creatures of God's earth lay hidden under that treacherous surface.

She began again presently.

"There is something on my mind to tell you, dear Blyth. It may be nothing, and yet— I wonder could Steenie Hawkshaw have seen my mother after she left me at the farm?"

Blyth started violently, almost guiltily; then, controlling himself, asked,

"What makes you think that?"

"*Think* it, no; not that exactly. But there is a curious feeling on my mind that it might be so. To explain it a little, for it is only a fancy, I must tell you something that happened, Blyth, the night of the storm, after you left us."

Then Joy, faltering, with a modest country maiden's feeling, who does not think it right to boast her conquests, told of young Hawkshaw's words to her in the hut, and his anger at the revelation of who her mother was.

"Exactly. I thought as much," assented Blyth, with a curious reluctance to enter further into the subject; and as if that ended all to be said.

"But stay, you don't see; you can't understand," pursued Joy. "I told you a little of what *she* said to me that dreadful morning when I saw her last, but not all. There was something more; but all that day I could not tell you, for it did not seem to matter, and you were so busy at the farm with—with the police. And ever since you have been searching these three nights and two long days. Oh, what years those hours have seemed! She was very angry, as I told you, to hear of our engagement, and cried out she had always meant me for young Hawkshaw, and urged and ordered me to have him instead of listening to what I said. I did not like before to tell you all her ravings, poor dear."

"Tell me now," said Blyth, in a suppressed, deeper voice than usual. "I have had something to tell you also, but it will keep awhile."

To abbreviate the questioning and answers with which these two lovers naturally broke Joy's discourse, it may now be told without these interruptions, which one invited and the other gave not necessarily, but in proof of mutual sympathy and affection.

On that sunny morning, then, when all nature seemed rejoicing, and the hay making was in full swing in the meadows, Joy, finding Blyth and even old Hannah unaccountably absent (about their various work, no doubt, she thought), had betaken herself to a favorite occupation of nailing up some creepers, everlasting sweet-pea and morning-glories, in the garden. As she gayly hammered her own pretty nails often enough, instead of the iron ones, she was singing at the top of her voice, while standing on a step-ladder.

Thus, being deaf to all around her, Joy all at once felt the ladder violently shaken, and looking down alarmed, while catching at the creepers for support, saw, with infinite amazement, her mother.

Magdalen had never been inside the farm-gates all these years. She was no longer looking round affrighted for fear of any stranger, however, but exclaimed, as if in extreme haste and impatience,

"Come down at once, Joy, come down. You made such a noise

I could not get you to hear me. I want to speak to you immediately! immediately!"

Seeing the glitter of her mother's eye, and feeling the strangeness of this visit, Joy got quickly down, and, quietly taking her hand, endeavored to lead Magdalen into the parlor.

"We shall be alone there," she said, "the farm-servants often come by here, and you won't wish them to hear us."

But Magdalen resisted.

"Let all the world hear me; the world, and all that is therein! I fear nobody and nothing now," she exclaimed, in a loud voice, looking round defiantly, although wrapping her cloak about her with a secret air. "The devil is dead, child; he was drowned last night in the Chad. I went to get some water for poor Rachel this morning, and saw him lying there in the Deadman's Pool. Then I took to my heels, and ran down here to tell you."

"Oh, come into the house, mother dear," implored Joy, to whom it was dreadful that this frenzied talk, as she believed it, should be overheard; and looking round in agony.

"Ha! you are cunning, I see. Yes, yes, as you are his child, it is wiser of you. I can be careful, too!" said Magdalen, whispering now, and sitting down on the bench in the porch, drawing Joy close beside her, with a tenacious grasp, wonderful in those slim fingers. "You think me mad, child, but I'm not. See, here is the little can I took, and this is some of the water he was baptized in. Was he washed from his sins, do you think? I hope he was, but still I don't—oh, I *don't* want to meet him in heaven!"

With difficulty Joy persuaded her mother to allow her arm to be relieved of the can's weight, while still Magdalen kept her cloak closely huddled about her. But she went on more coherently, telling how that, as Joy knew, Da Silva, her father, was a convict; nay, more! that he had been only some fourteen miles away all these years, in the moor-prison. She acted, unconsciously, the scene of his entering the cottage with such vividness, giving even the smallest details of her own and Rachel's behavior at first so naturally, that a sudden revelation that here was no insanity came upon Joy; and, clasping her hands, she exclaimed,

"Merciful heavens! it is true, then. Go on, go on, mother! Tell me all."

"What is there so much more to tell?" returned Magdalen, pausing suspiciously at once on being urged. "He mistook the ford last night, and is drowned; and we are free, free as the birds, now!"

Then she went on, rubbing the palm of her hand restlessly to and fro on her knee.

"I didn't kill him; no, I didn't, though I thought I would. And then he tried to kill us instead. Is that divine justice? Rachel is very ill now—she saved me from being stabbed by him. He always liked her best. There, now, be calm; do be quiet, Joy!" for the girl sprung up, horrified, with entreaties to know the worst about her Aunt Rachel.

"She had to stay very quiet yesterday, and the fog made her worse; but now you shall nurse her. I never was good at that."

"But *him*—the body! I must find Blyth at once, and he will help us," cried out Joy, distracted.

"Blyth, indeed. No, you shall not tell him. I don't like him; from this time forth you shall not speak to him. A mere farmer's son, and no fit company for you."

"Oh, mother! I am going to marry him—I have promised him," burst from Joy's lips, who felt pained and vexed, even while suffering so much greater agony, to hear her Blyth underrated.

"Marry him! now—now that we are free!" shrieked Magdalen, stretching out one arm and shaking her clinched hand against her child in violent denunciation. "You shall not do it—never! never! you will not dare to brave my curse by crossing me. I mean you to marry young Hawkshaw, and be a lady, and mistress of the Barton. I can come and visit you there, and we will travel, and be gay and rich, and visit London and Paris again; but I could not condescend to enter a mere farm like this."

The poor soul looked round with a lofty air at the pretty Red House in its homely garden, and the fair view before her of the Chad valley and the hills around.

"Aunt Rachel has always wished it. Oh, mother, he and I have grown up together as if meant for each other," faltered Joy, feeling cold with the dread of another dark cloud of evil drawing over her. "And as to Steenie Hawkshaw, dear, don't think of him. He does not want me for a wife. Blyth Berrington is too noble to mind my—my parentage; young Hawkshaw *would*."

Magdalen doubled herself up, rocking back and forward with a whimpering cry.

"All against me to thwart my wishes, you and Rachel, and even this young fellow. But no, he *did* want you; it must be some mismanagement. Go and tell him your father is no more, child. Say you will be rich, you will have a fortune. Men love gold; gold-mines is what they all want."

Joy pleaded, soothed, tried to reason with her.

"How can I beg a young man to marry me, dear mother? You love me, you love Aunt Rachel; do not make us both unhappy even to please yourself."

"Yes, yes, poor Rachel—of course. But still—oh, I do want to have my own way at last!" Magdalen returned, weeping in a low, hysterical way, pitifully, like a vexed child. "Such a miserable life as I have led, chained all these years under that great rock up in the glen, fettered by fears. Rachel is a saint of goodness, but she always liked being dull. And now, if you marry your country clown, she will want me to settle down like herself into feeling a grandmother, I know; and will only be happy knitting socks for your babies, with no more change of life than an old tree. No, trees put off their leaves in winter, that's their change; we are more like sheep, just a woolly shawl on and a little more miserable weather in winter—no other difference between the seasons."

"Mother, mother, only think that all this time we are leaving Aunt Rachel alone, and she so ill! We can talk of all this later; there is no hurry," implored Joy, in accents of the most agonized haste and distress, only controlled by fears of exciting her mother too much, even in a right direction.

"Would you give up your Blyth if young Hawkshaw *did* still ask

you to be his wife?" Magdalen reiterated, only partly heeding her daughter.

"What does it matter whether I say yes or no? He will never ask me. Oh, mother, mother, let me go! Come yourself. Remember how often she has nursed you."

The last words seemed to restore Magdalen to some sense of the real situation of matters about her. She rose too, and said in a nervous, hurried voice,

"Don't think ill of me, dear child. There is no one like Rachel; but I do so hate sick-rooms. I was with her all yesterday, and did my best, indeed" (that was true), "but now I feel so tired of being mewed up in the cottage. I want a little fresh air and liberty. Do you go to your aunt; promise me not to leave her till I come back, for I will only just ramble for a little way, and then return. Promise me."

So Joy promised, with hurried beseechings to her mother not to be late; then sought Blyth and Hannah with vainly flying footsteps till she heard from the servant-maid they had gone up the glen. Thither she sped after them, supposing they had heard the news; and avoiding the Chad and the sight of any human being on the farm, for she felt branded as a convict's daughter. It was her own father who had twice attempted, if not committed, murder in his escape, and who lay somewhere near—drowned.

"Do you think she could possibly have tried to see Steenie Hawkshaw? Is it any clew?" asked poor Joy of Blyth, with anxious half-shame at her own idea, when she had ended.

"Yes, dear, we found that clew," said Blyth, slowly and heavily. He felt himself a brute, well-nigh, in his inability to break the truth to her as gently as he could have wished.

Nevertheless, she was dimly aware of some of the great kindness and pity in his bosom as she grasped his arm closely now, trembling.

"We found she was seen going to the Barton, where she asked to speak to Steenie. Don't be hurt, dearest; but, whatever passed between them, he seems to have been rude and insulting." (Blyth had some ado to say this quietly, though his face took a grim, sternly set expression.) "Anyhow, she was next seen hurrying out of the Barton gate, and taking her way up the hills as fast as possible, and over the moor. She may have passed across the Moortown road, and gone higher still. No one has seen her since."

"Is that all you have to tell me?" asked Joy, with suppressed passion that made lightnings of her eyes, while her throat tightened and her heart beat violently.

"That is all I need tell you."

"Then it is *his* fault—young Hawkshaw's fault," said the girl, fiercely, her quick Southern blood asserting itself.

Blyth, for all answer, passed his arm round her waist and imprisoned both her hands in his, as it to keep her still. Then, looking down closely at her, he said,

"Remember your battles are mine, dear, so far as a man may rightly and lawfully fight them for you. Steenie Hawkshaw is ashamed enough now of his conduct, you may be fairly sure."

"But that is not enough. Ashamed! I want him to be hurt, too, remorseful, *punished as he deserves!*" breathed the girl, passionately, stamping her foot.

"That vengeance is not ours; wait!" said the young man, with a stern inner belief that what sins are not otherwise righted surely avenge themselves by natural laws of cause and effect. Then, in a changed tone of sudden surprise, he exclaimed, "Look! see! what is that?"

They had reached the brow of the moors immediately above Cold-home, and down in the glen they now perceived a crowd of little beings, darting round the cottage hither and thither. A school seemed broken loose and running riot in play-hours.

Not pausing to ask each other what such an unusual event might mean, only knowing it portended some news, whether of good or ill, both ran down the path toward Cold-home at their utmost speed.

CHAPTER XLV.

"I winna play at stane-chucking,
Nor will I play at the ba',
But I'll gae up to yon bonnie green hill,
And there we'll warsell a fa';
They warsled up, they warsled down,
Till John fell to the ground;
A dirk fell out of Willie's pouch
And gave him a deadly wound."

Old Ballad.

IF Blyth had not told Joy all the details of her mother's visit to the Barton, it was a pious fraud. The truth he kept back was as follows:

When he heard the rumors of poor Magdalen having been seen at the Hawkshaws, it was the second day of the painful quest, and Blyth was then on the moors with one of the scattered search-parties. He galloped off on good Brownberry in hot haste to the Barton, eager to ascertain more, and suspecting no ill there.

Blyth saw old Hawkshaw, distinctly, shambling behind the close-clipped cherry-laurel hedges, in what he was pleased to call his little pleasure-ground (an open grass-plot). The old man must have recognized Blyth also, but disappeared into the house. The Barton had been rebuilt, and was now a pretentious sort of small villa, with whitewashed walls and a sickly "puzzle-monkey" shrub or two edging its curving graveled walk, of a few yards in length, in a forlorn manner. Tying Brownberry to the gate, Blyth pulled the bell at the front-door for some minutes without seeing or hearing a sign of life on the premises. Provoked at thus losing time, he strode round to the yard behind, equally empty, and there hammered so soundly at the fastened kitchen-door that the echoes resounded. A mongrel sort of mastiff and a lurcher hereupon tore at their chains and howled at him, till their throats must have been sore.

At last came a rasping sound in answer.

A rusty window was opened overhead, and a crone put her head out to ask what he wanted. But hardly waiting for young Berrington's explanations, she bade him go off; him and his search-parties be dratted! Her master said they would get no satisfaction from

him, and advised the Berringtons, father and son, to try to find some wits for themselves before hunting the moors for a crazy beggar-woman who never had any.

The window closed again with a snap, and Blyth was left alone.

He went off repulsed and chafed now, all the more resolved to inquire closely or bring the police. But at a wretched cottage by the roadside belonging to old Hawkshaw he got his information. A woman therein, smarting under notice of dismissal from her landlord, told how she had felt curious on seeing one of the wisht sisters stealthily hurrying by, cloaked and hooded, with an excited air as if afraid of being seen, and watched her going in at the Barton gate. This was so odd that the woman caught up her baby and went out to see what next might happen; wishing also to have a better look at one of the strange recluses whom she had never seen near. She had not waited a few moments when a terrible noise was heard inside the house. Steenie Hawkshaw appeared, pushing out the poor madwoman, who resisted, clinging to him and shrieking out entreaties to be heard. Old Hawkshaw stood by, roaring with laughter at the fun. Suddenly ceasing her importunities, Magdalen collected herself and walked to the gate with the dignity of the finest lady in the land. Then, stopping short and raising her arm like a play-actress, she pronounced words of such an awful curse upon the inmates of the house that the poor laborer's wife, listening, declared her blood ran cold! Even Blyth was appalled, hearing the anathemas but partly repeated: denunciations which in all her life one might swear Magdalen never could have heard. It was enough to make him believe in the old doctrine of possession, and that the demon within that frail, delicate form had cried out, not she herself. What followed was as terrible in a different way. Young Steenie then shouted out he would set his dogs upon her. And unfastening the two house-dogs, although holding them by their chains, he called out two or three terriers from the stables, hissing them at Magdalen, and following them up himself with half-tipsy, brutal mirth. Screaming, the unhappy woman fled as for her life down the road, on and on, followed by the posse, snapping, yelping, barking at her heels; besides jeered by a troop of small urchins such as seem to spring up from the earth on all occasions of unusual events.

"The terriers didn't bite her, but law! she had the heart as frightened in her body as if they had," said the woman. "And if Steenie had not held in the big dogs with all his might, they would have torn her to bits."

Then in desperation, as it seemed, Magdalen climbed up the hillside that there led steeply to the moors, and so presently the chase dropped. That was all.

Blyth, on hearing this, only asked, quietly,

"Where might Stephen Hawkshaw be likely found?"

The woman said at the inn of Drewston (a little village popularly supposed to be thus called as a corruption of Druid's town.)

Thither went Blyth, and Brownberry's reeking sides showed the pace as he drew bridle after a mile and a half's gallop. The inn there boasted a rickety billiard-table, which, however wretched, was a chief attraction to young Hawkshaw and a few other idle spirits lower in the social scale than himself. For he loved to be king of

his company at times, or, as he expressed it, "cock of the walk." He was taking an afternoon drink at the bar now, with some of these companions, when Berrington came in and curtly asked him for a few moments' private conversation. Hawkshaw returned rudely he wanted to hear nothing from him, nor himself to say anything to him.

"Are you afraid of what I may have to ask?" said Blyth, low, seeing his enemy quailed under his eye; being indeed tormented by visions he was trying to drown in drink of a dead woman lying in the bogs.

"Afraid—?"

Hawkshaw fired up at that, and looked round for admiring scorn of such a charge from his backers, but out of respect for Blyth's request, whose favor it was not amiss to conciliate, they had all retired a few steps aside.

Seeking to command his temper, Blyth demanded to know for what cause Steenie had turned out of his house, two days ago, the poor woman now lost on the moors.

"For what? Because she came and nearly worried the life and soul out of me. Would you like to know *why* she came, eh?"

And, exulting in the opportunity of giving a nasty wound to his successful rival, Steenie jeeringly went on,

"*You'll* be interested, so I'll tell you as a kindness. She came to beg me to marry her daughter—there! wanted to bribe me with ravings of gold she would give me; ha, ha! I wish you good luck of your mother-in-law, if you find her."

"Hold your tongue, I advise you, since you may be responsible before God for her death," said Blyth, in a tone so stern it brought a horrible conviction of guilt for a moment to his hearer's brain, though inflamed and confused by drink. Then adding, "You neither knew who she was nor what she was," he moved toward the door round which the men were grouped.

But Hawkshaw yelled after him, striking his fist on the bar among the glasses,

"What is that you say? Stop a bit—I'll tell you before these gentlemen here. Says I don't know who the old mad-woman is that he is hunting for through the country. Well, she called herself by the name of Stone, and she's own mother to Miss Joy Haythorn, so-called up at the Red House, who is said to be engaged, or likely to be, to our neighbor, Mr. Blyth Berrington here, and I wish him much joy of her. And as to *what* the old witch was—"

He uttered some coarse expressions, on which Blyth, turning sharply back, caught him near the throat, and ordered him to take back his own words as a foul lie. Stephen wrestled violently. Stronger by far though Blyth was, his opponent was muscular and quick as a panther. A few seconds the bystanders watched the struggle with breathless interest, then as Stephen, gasping still, refused to retract his words, Berrington (having foreseen some such likely emergency) gave him a severe chastising with the short riding-whip he carried stuck in his pocket, then walked out of the inn, and rode away. In two days the fame of this exploit went far and near. Only Joy did not hear of it.

But ill deeds breed emulation still more than good ones, unhap-

pily. And one of the boys who saw Hawkshaw chasing poor Magdalen it was that now had been fired to organize the raid on the cottage.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"Oh, near ones, dear ones! you in whose right hands
Our own rests calm: whose faithful hearts all day
Wide open wait, till back from distant lands
Thought, the tired traveler, wends his homeward way.

"Young children, and old neighbors, and old friends,
Old servants—you, whose smiling circle small
Grows slowly smaller, till at last it ends
Where in one grave is room enough for all.

"Oh, shut the world out from the heart you cheer!
Tho' small the circle of your smiles may be,
The world is distant, and your smiles are near:
This makes you more than all the world to me."

LORD LYTTON.

SINCE the day when the children of Bethel came out with their mockings of "Go up, thou baldhead," other little ones through ages have repeated the good or evil outcries, or hosannahs, caught up from their parents' lips, and so have been blessed or cursed, according as the righteousness or the sins of the fathers were visited on the next generation.

On reaching the little cottage, Blyth found it attacked by a swarm of all the village children. They were jeering at old Hannah, who stood scolding them from the porch like a demented being. Every now and then she would make a short raid upon the enemy, which dispersed at once, far outstripping her heavy movements, and then returned with fresh delight to bait her.

A shower of missiles was flung against the cottage walls as Blyth appeared, in haste to the relief. Most were inoffensive enough; twigs, lumps of moss, but some few stones rattled about the door, to Blyth's anger.

He dived into the fray, while Hannah uttered exclamations of thankfulness at the unlooked-for succor.

"Oh, Mr. Blyth, you don't know what mischief they've done. They've gone and screamed out to Miss Rachel about her sister being lost in the bogs—and she knows it all! Goodness forgive me for being angry with such children, but to spare them would be to spoil them."

Catching one of the ringleaders, whom he recognized as an incorrigible brat (so far in the imp's history), Blyth held him fast, kicking and struggling. Then, calling to the rest, who at once dispersed with cries of alarm, he announced he was going to make a scapegoat of his prey, and duck him in the river; the others might follow, and see, if they liked. Thereupon, tucking the shrieking victim under his arm, tight-pinioned, Blyth started down by the Chad toward the village. Of course the rest of the little crew all trooped after him, at a distance, however, fearful and ready to rush off if he looked round. The pied piper of Hamelin was no less sure of small followers.

The whole way to the village Blyth led them a dance after him,

Then, pitying the mental pangs of his prisoner, he solemnly ducked the latter's head at a convenient shallow place, and led him, howling, with dripping pate, to his mother. As the maternal wrath against the culprit was apt, by frequent necessity therefor, to be easily aroused, Blyth harangued all the other matrons who were attracted to the scene by the crowd of children. He told them—what few, and none there, yet knew—of the escaped convict's nocturnal visit to the cottage up the glen. Then, their curiosity and love of horror being roused, he excited their womanly pity for the poor sisters. One who no doubt was afflicted at times, yet whom none of them had ever known to hurt a fly, as Blyth affirmed with honest kindling zeal, had been so dazed and frightened that all knew her supposed terrible fate—lost straying on the moors, it seemed. The other lay dangerously ill; the best and gentlest woman, as he, Blyth Berrington, declared, he had ever known from his childhood. And all were aware how long she had been his father's tenant.

The women being moved by natural commiseration for the dead, and the speaker's own earnest and burning indignation that *must* stir hearts always (Blyth's own words surprising himself, by inflaming what he had secretly blamed himself for as stolidity of feeling respecting poor Magdalen, something as flame-tongues leap higher and higher up a bonfire hitherto a cold mass), murmurs of pity broke out among the hearers. Blyth then made his last artful appeal, described the children's behavior, and, worse, unconscious cruelty to one of their elders, a lame, sick creature—pointing to the hot faces, the torn and soiled clothes of the band. The last plea moved all the housewives to the very marrow of their feelings. On every side offspring were snatched up, and punishments of such primitive nature ensued, to a chorus of infantile howls and squeals, that Blyth fled in disamy, feeling as if so many small sucking pigs were being butchered.

Never again would those children make a raid up the glen, he knew; and yet, though convinced he had done rightly, he was half ashamed of his harshness, weary and sick of all the events of the last few days.

Back up the glen went he with heavy steps to ask after Rachel.

Hannah met him with more heavy news. Joy and she had left Rachel alone that afternoon for one hour and a half, while they both attended the funeral at her own solemn command. Her brave, noble spirit would not suffer hindering others in their duty. She never asked was Magdalen going to the funeral, perhaps feared to know. There was no one to stay with her; she had prayed them faintly to send no strange woman; and indeed her illness lay now heavier on the mind than the body. So, as she lay in her weakness, with thoughts far beyond earth, the children's clamor had started her—adventurously clamoring at the door, and thrusting their faces closely at the little windows. Rising, affrighted, from her sick-bed, she was met by foolish outcries against the witch! taunts and jeers as to where her sister was?—lost! lost! since three days, in the bogs on the moor.

When Hannah reached the cottage, having been set down by Farmer Berrington at the foot-stile beside the high-road nearest

Cold-home, she found the children, unchidden, dancing like a ring of gnats about the brown nest from which one bird had flown. Rachel Estonia seemed utterly overwhelmed and sunken under the dreadful intelligence. No need now for their anxious consultations, how to break to her that the charge and burden of her life she had loved so well was taken from her.

She never asked was it true, seeming to understand too well their late evasive replies as to Magdalen's absence.

"Hannah! Hannah! After all my years of watching to lose her so."

That was all.

"The ways of Providence are mysterious," answered the old nurse, with tears raining down her cheeks, though Rachel, white and still, did not weep. "Think how many a mother brings up her child for years and years with care and prayer, and sees it grow up to be a sorrow and shame at last. It's worse to know a soul lost than only a body, and there's no life so hard but what you'll find others that had as hard to bear—or harder."

Rachel Estonia raised her dark eyes slowly at that, without speech; the words had gone into her heart, and brought some balm there.

That evening, late, Blyth Berrington drove up the spring-cart from the farm, with a mattress and blankets laid inside. Joy helped him to lift Rachel into it with tender care. Then they locked the cottage door, taking almost nothing away with them; indeed, there was little to take.

But, before leaving, Joy, struck by a sudden thought, hastily ran back and lit the lantern that still stood in its accustomed place on the window-sill. The young girl looked still at its red glow as the cart drove away, Hannah sitting at Rachel's feet, Joy supporting the latter's head on her lap.

"There will be no other life lost while I can keep that burning," she thought.

(The last three nights she had done likewise.)

And thus that night how strangely was realized Joy's frequent happy dream of having her Aunt Rachel living also with herself among the comforts of the Red House Farm, and Rachel's unspoken, vague longing to be with the child of her heart.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"Many a green isle needs must be
In the deep, wide sea of misery,
Or the mariner, worn and wan,
Never thus could voyage on
Day and night and night and day
Drifting on his weary way.

* * * * *

Ay, many flowering islands lie
In the waters of wide Agony."—SHELLEY.

RACHEL lay very ill for days at the Red House, during which time Joy nursed her with the most devoted tenderness. Something of Rachel's mantle seemed to have fallen upon the girl with her new

experiences in suffering; she was so brave, patient, and showed a wonderful sick-room instinct for knowing always what to do that is a native gift.

Hannah did much, but Joy did more.

By degrees the sick woman recovered. She had been, indeed, long inured to suffering in her life, had long ago learned to walk down the grievous valley of life with her eyes fixed on the far light she saw shining over the dark hills at the end, unheeding the pains and wounds that afflicted herself alone on the road. Now that she could no longer hope to do anything for Gaspard, could do no more for her beloved sister on earth, a strange calm took possession of her.

Joy was the light of her eyes, her support, comfort, care-taker. To Rachel, who had not known for years the feeling of being thus tended and lovingly surrounded with attention—she who had so long given the best of her life in Magdalen's service—how sweet it was to be thus cared for herself!

As she lay in the black-raftered bedroom of the Red House, looking out on the garden, in a soft bed, the sheets smelling of dried lavender, while fresh scents of living flowers came up through the unlatched window, Rachel Estonia liked just to watch and watch Joy's straight, brisk figure, her young face glowing with dark beauty and health, and the quick, helpful stirring of her hands. Some strong persons seem by their own healthiness to insult the weakness of the sick; others to give something of their own cheery vigor by the very touch of their hands. And of the latter was Joy.

When the July days were becoming few, and the hay was long gone from the fields, and the bramble in white flower, then, with tottering steps, Rachel at last came down into the garden-plot, leaning on Joy's shoulder. Blyth carpentered for her a wooden seat near the beehives, for she loved to hear their humming (faintly reminding her, maybe, of the heather hills where now she had no heart to go). On one side the scarlet-runner beans hid her from being seen from the lane, for she shunned being wondered at or eyed with pity; on the other, white jasmine stars covered the cob-wall, and Joy's great poppies, with their silky petals, burned against the gray moorstone lower course of the house. For days, Rachel spoke very little; but there would sit, looking at the hills whence, as says David, cometh help, while peace and refreshment flowed gently into her soul. And she said to them, she felt somewhat as did the Christiana and her family during their stay at the House Beautiful, near which lay the Valley of Humiliation, where the pilgrims went down and gathered lilies.

The aunt and niece were both dressed in black, but wore no deeper sign of mourning. Rachel abstained, since she was too poor to buy crape, and in her heart despised such outward show; Joy, because of Farmer Berrington's earnest request. The good man had been sorely exercised by all the gossip during the time of the inquest at the farm, together with the search for poor Magdalen, and lasting, indeed, for days afterward. Himself, his house, and all its inmates had been the subject of what he most hated all his life—that is, the idle talk of busybodies.

With the generous warmth of youth, Joy would have now readily

declared herself the daughter of the lost woman whom wrongs and her own temperament had distracted. Ay! and the girl would have scorned those who scorned her for her origin, and held her head the higher; feeling dimly as if thereby some reparation for the cruelties of fate could be made to the poor shade one might imagine hovering over some of the reedy marshes, or black sloughs away close under the low clouds on the upper moor; where human life was none, and but few small birds or wild creatures.

But Farmer Berrington said his nay, decidedly; and as he had accepted Joy for a daughter-in-law, he was in his rights. "Why raise more talk?" he asked, striking his oak stick on the floor. "Can it do good to those that are gone? No! Then leave well alone; and tongues will soon stop wagging."

To tell the honest truth, the old man was crotchety and uncertain in temper the end of this summer. He was aged and heavy, and, having manfully helped day and night in the search for Magdalen, had taken a cough and wheezing in his chest that seemed likely not to leave him. A man shall do his duty; yet be unhappily racked by rheumatics and lumbago therefor. And if so tormented he may be testy, however good and upright in his life. No doctor's embrocations allayed old Berrington's pain much. Nor would he, naturally perhaps, listen to frequent messages sent him of the favorite village remedies for rheumatisms. These were to put a slab of fat bacon on his chest, or be rubbed with benzoline oil night and morning, disregarding the smell.

"O la, my dear creature!" Hannah would now cry to all gossips who came on this last errand of mercy, "why, my young mistress says he'd burn, the dear soul, if a candle went near him, like one of them Christian martyrs."

Even Blyth saw no use in Joy's telling more of her parentage. *Cui bono?* he too thought. As Joy Haythorn, his sweetheart had grown up at the farm; as such he wished her to remain known in the country. And when Joy naturally said that by her own name of Da Silva she must truly be married, he replied, almost testily, that of course they must be married at the nearest big town, and have a license, and keep it all dark. Besides, Steenie Hawkshaw's version of the story to his idle associates was disregarded even by them as tipsy chatter, and, since his horsewhipping, but little had been heard of him, for a sufficient reason. Having been urged by the witnesses of his defeat to drown his fury in drink, before inflicting a sevenfold revengeful chastisement on Blyth by breaking every bone in his body, and being likewise truly sorely pricked by his conscience accusing him of almost murder, the weak-headed young man drove back to the Barton in a state of maddened drunkenness. Finding another dog-cart ahead in a narrow lane between the immensely high banks of that country, Steenie, with his friend, the veterinary surgeon, roared out he would swallow no one's dust, and, lashing his horse furiously, tried to pass the other vehicle. This was impossible, for the deep trackway like many thereabouts, had been only meant in olden days for pack horses.

There was a hot race for precedence down the lane; since, foreseeing trouble, the first-comer, a sporting lawyer from Moortown, had also whipped up his beast. Coming down a steep bit of a hill

at a tearing pace, there was a violent collision. Steenie was pitched out, and his leg broken in two places, his dog-cart shattered, and the mare badly injured. The others came less to grief; but naturally the lawyer brought a fine bill of damages, which made old Hawkshaw doubly exasperated with his son, being angry already at the injury to his own mare and cart. Thus for weeks Steenie lay at the Barton, unable to stir, deserted perforce by his boon companions, whom his father now angrily denounced as rogues and idiots!

Blyth further held that, while there were some difficulties, anyway, about the matter of the real name and family history of his wife that was soon to be, there would be more in opening the door wide to gossip about poor Magdalen and Count Rivello. His convict father-in-law was in truth no matter of pride to Blyth, and a secret thorn in the flesh to old Berrington; though both strove to hide their sore feeling from poor Joy.

But she guessed it.

"Let us be married immediately. You will have my name, then. That will put a stop to all questions," said Blyth, rather dictatorially.

Then Joy faltered, clasping both her hands on his arm, and standing straight and slim beside him, in the shadow of the deep farm-porch, while the moon rose over the hills.

"Dear, it grieves me to think your future wife should have her origin gossiped and wondered over. Besides, the Berringtons have been proud of being an honest, upright family for generations. I should bring the first stain into their history, and—and—I could not bear to think that! Oh, let me go away quietly with my Aunt Rachel, when she is well enough. Indeed, I shall think it quite right, if you love some other girl more happy in her parents, and marry her."

Whereupon, for the first time since many days, Joy began crying, but in a quiet way, with much resolve in her manner and voice, nevertheless.

Of course Blyth laughed her to scorn, calling her a silly child, and kissing her forehead. But, as she still persisted he should weigh the matter, he took both her hands into his own, and said, with decision,

"My poor darling! I swear to you I will marry no other girl, and will hold you to your promise—so there! Never trouble your dear little head about a pedigree. Mine will be sufficient for us both—so marry me in a fortnight."

Whereupon, he felt pleased with himself, with a masterful sense of getting his own way always, and as a man does who knows he is doing a right and perhaps fine deed.

Joy consented to say no more about giving up Blyth.

The girl's heart was swelled with a strange pride, that kept telling herself she should be judged by her own worth, and not made to bear shame for her father's sins or her mother's misfortunes. Nevertheless, with a newly broken spirit, she was aware that, as this world is ordered, it most often *is* thus!

Yes, she would marry Blyth, because she believed no one else could ever love him with such great love, such devotion, as herself—and that forever. Her loving soul, deep and true, had chosen him

as master, and his will was her law. Yet she felt a little chillness at heart, slight as the first frosts of September nights, aware that Blyth and his father would have smoked their pipes o' nights with greater ease and comfort of mind had Gaspard da Silva died unfreed in his prison up yonder, and had not Magdalen's sorrowful affliction been blazoned and magnified by vulgar tongues; though doubtless the Berringtons had borne much willingly for the sake of their duty to God and love of Joy's own self.

That was all! Ah, well, thought the girl; Who is perfectly happy?

But she would by no means consent to be married till September was over, out of respect to her mother's memory. And Rachel, however seldom she spoke, and almost never interfered—being like one whose occupation was to foster the wretched only, and finds that gone—gravely blessed her on hearing her resolve, saying she was right.

Joy wanted to pass some time in secret thought, *and to try to feel true sorrow* for her mother's loss!

Shocked she had been, as the great change to seriousness told, that gave depth to the young girl's expression; most grieved and horror-stricken. But as Magdalen had relegated her own duties to Rachel and Hannah, whom Joy felt with a tightened heart she loved (even the latter) far, far better, so the poor girl was repentant of what seemed her own hardheartedness, and strove to feel a rightful daughter's sorrow for the mother *Magdalen might have been*.

Of her dead father she tried to think less, shrinking from the awful questions as to his future fate that must arise at times. And yet there was a germ, a natural instinct, in her heart, though never fostered by circumstances, that made her also sorry not to be more sorry!

So Joy asked to be left to pass the next two months almost in perfect seclusion at the farm; which wish, being fulfilled, it thence followed that few, if any, in the sparsely peopled neighborhood knew of Rachel's presence there, or, if known, it was attributed to Farmer Berrington's goodness of heart, pitying her bereavement. The days passed softly and still, therefore, and the wheat-fields ripened in August, and the apples grew red and yellow in September, thickly hung among the leaves in the orchard.

It was a serious time, and yet not without its sweetness.

“ In tyme of harvest mery it is ynough;
Peres and apples hangen on bough.
The hayward bloweth mery his horne;
In every felde ripe is corne;
The grapes hangen on the vyne;
Swete is trewe love and fyne.”

Of “trewe love,” in spite of her chastened mood and daily hours spent sewing beside Rachel in mostly silent reflection, Joy and Blyth tasted still some sweet moments. Many an evening they wandered together across the low meadows to the Chad; and there smelled the creamy, meadow sweet spires heavy on the air, and watched the kingfisher's blue, quick gleam, or the fish rise.

But Blyth was away several times on business relating to his Australian property, which he thought it well to settle before his honeymoon. And more—there was some talk of old Hawkshaw selling

the best portion, far more than half, of his land; which, fitting nicely into the Red Farm ground at the fattest part of the Chad valley, would make a fair and pleasant-lying, if not a fine, estate of the Berringtons' freehold, if thereunto added. The cause was strange enough—as follows:

Steenie Hawkshaw, lying helpless and ill-cared for at the Barton, with only his father for company and their old housekeeper, a cross hag, had besought leave to send for a certain widow to help nurse him and while away the time. She was a handsome woman, older than himself, whose society in Moortown, Steenie (keeping it dark) a good deal affected. As to her character, as Hannah remarked, "There is little call to talk about what there's so little of."

Three weeks later the countryside was ringing with the news that old Hawkshaw himself had taken the widow to wife, in a secret and sudden way. Young Steenie, hardly yet able to use his crutches, found himself duped, deserted, abused for his debts by his old father and stepmother, and likely to be disinherited of what little remained to the Hawkshaws, in favor of the new mistress of the Barton, the old man's debts being fitting parents to those of the son.

Poor Steenie! His retribution had come sharp and swift. Blyth felt even sorry for him; if better brought-up he might have been a gay and pleasant-tempered fellow enough. As soon as he could well move he left the Barton, pale and miserable-looking, and went to Bristol to a cousin for a while, finding home unendurable.

So all things had regained serenity and a regular swing once more of duties to do, and duties done, at the Red House. The weather was pleasant, some plentiful showers calling out the dried sweetness of the earth too. And all were fairly well again in health, which means so much of happiness in the daily reckoning. Only old Dick was ill, and that in a strange way, which now requires being told.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"Don't expose me! Just this once!
This was the first and only time, I'll swear—
Look at me!—see, I kneel!—the only time,
I swear, I ever cheated."—BROWNING.

"Tam o' the Lin grew dourie and douce,
And he sat on a stane at the end o' his house;
'What ails, auld chiel?' He looked haggard and thin.
'I'm no very cheery,' quo' Tam o' the Lin.

"Tam o' the Lin lay down to die,
And his friends whispered softly and wofully,
'We'll buy you some masses to scour away sin';
'And drink at my lyke-wake,' quo' Tam o' the Lin."

Tam o' the Lin.

It was in the last days of August that old Dick took ill, owing to a fall he got when standing on a cart full of wheat-sheaves, helping to pitchfork them into the upper barn, and stepping back a little too far. It was a heavy fall, and injured his back badly, so that he could only lie without doing a stroke of work that autumn.

Here was a chance for Rachel Estonia to be once more useful, and immediately she seized it.

Hitherto, the lonely sister had seemed during the past months of the summer as one only half awake from a terrible, troubled dream, however sweetly her great dark eyes smiled on those around. Or again, looking at her pale and worn, though still noble features, you might fancy her a nun who, after spending the best of her life in solitary seclusion and religious contemplation, had been by some chance brought back to the world and set down by a happy hearth. She seemed in a strange land, and stilly smiled on its ways and domestic happiness, but was too old herself to learn them; there was no more springtime for her. She moved among them like a statue almost, finding nothing of a place or need for her services in that easy-ordered household, where none had much work, and all only strove to spare her; where no one was ailing.

When old Dick took ill, however, Rachel got her call. She went daily to his cottage—a thriftless, untidy place it was, though he had a wife, but no children at home. Rachel doctored him, cooked and tidied, read to him, even sat up there at nights often. And, above all, she bore patiently with old Dick's crossness and churlish nature. New energy and her old independence seemed to return with this charge to her body and mind.

For some three weeks Rachel was thus busied; but old Dick showed small signs of recovery. His back might be somewhat better, but in mind he only grew more broken-down and hopeless of health; he slept little and badly, being troubled with terrible dreams, from which he would wake up trembling and all in a cold sweat, so his wife told, who was a weak-minded, helpless sort of creature, a good soul enough. Old Dick swore so fearfully at her for saying this, that Rachel severely reprimanded him. Though grumbling, Dick had come to adore the latter in a frightened, awed way as his good angel, the being who alone brought comfort and help to his dark hours. Yet at first it had been only by Blyth's own presence and firm desire that he could be prevailed on to let "the black witch" examine his injuries, and lay the pillows more easily for his sore bones.

So Dick grew worse and worse, sinking daily from being a tough and hale old fellow into a feeble dotard, only showing vigor in his flashes of ill-temper; and even *these*, mourned his wife, grew fewer.

One September night, Rachel, who had just lain down to sleep, was roused by a message that old Dick was dying, and wished to see her at once. Hastily dressing, she hurried down the lane with Joy, who, having heard the news likewise, had sprung up to accompany her; and Blyth, who, not having yet gone to bed, came to take charge of both.

It was dark down the lane, where the trees, still in full leafage, though yellowing in patches, met overhead. But they all remembered afterward how the hunter's moon, hanging overhead in the sky in a great silver disk—seeming larger than in any other month—shed a soft radiance over all the open country round. A night for sweet thoughts and hopefulness only; not for those of a sinful, troubled spirit, it seemed.

Rachel Estonia went alone quickly into the cottage. Blyth and Joy waited outside for her, and whispered at times, walking up and

down the lane together arm-in-arm, as affianced lovers might; though they shunned being seen by other eyes indulging in any such demonstrations of affection in a way old Farmer Berrington quite failed to understand.

Although they began by speaking of Dick and his possibly approaching end with pity, somehow soon the broken talk took a more tender turn. Blyth was saying,

“In one fortnight now, dear— Have you finished sewing the wedding-dress?”

A woman's sharp call rang out from the cottage. It was Rachel's voice. The door was flung open, and the light of the cottage interior gleamed in the lane. Both ran to the threshold, where Rachel was steadying herself by the door-post, her breast heaving, saying, with strong, self-enforced outward quiet, yet as one whose mind was almost beside itself,

“Come in here—listen! Dick says that Magdalen is not dead; that he helped her to escape beyond Moortown!”

It was true enough. They hurried in, but the fresh witnesses to Dick's repeated confession only confirmed its evident truth. The miserable old man declared, between gasps for breath, that he could bear the tortures of his conscience no longer, and would make a clean breast of it all; for his fall, he reiterated, was a punishment, he knew—ay, he knew!—and yet he had told no lie either, nor hurt the woman. But still, when Mistress Rachel had prayed and read to him, he had felt like one of the damned, knowing what she had suffered with grief for her mad sister's loss. So, as he had been taken that night as if death was coming, he would tell first—ay, ay!

Blyth bade him go on, then, and be quick about it.

The day Magdalen was lost, Dick related, he had been sent to Moortown with the wagon in the afternoon. And so, when about some three miles on his way, he saw a woman-creature dragging herself over the moors like a hunted hare. She made frantic signs to him to stop, but he would pay no heed at first, recognizing her, and thinking it was merely some silly-Sally craze; till she kept running along the road beside him. At last, plainly ready to drop with fatigue, she showed an odd-shaped bag she held strung over her arm under her cloak, and took out a gold sovereign from it, which she held up.

This seemed so strange an act, that Dick cried whoa! to his horses, out of pure curiosity, he averred. He turned over the gold piece, rang it, thought it a good one. Meantime, Magdalen implored him so urgently to give her a lift in the wagon, saying she was so tired, so tired, and that Farmer Berrington, her good friend, would not refuse her such a little service, that Dick complied.

After resting awhile in the wagon, getting near Moortown, she began making minute inquiries of Dick as to the neighborhood and roads, and how to go to London. As he got suspicious at this, and spoke of driving her back, Magdalen prayed and besought him not to tell she had gone away; adding a wild, confused tale of having been ill-used by the Hawkshaws, whom she hated, and that she was merely going away for a short time, a very little while! It was so dull and lonely in the glen.

If only Dick would help her, she would give him five more sovereigns—ten! And she assured him again and again she was soon coming back to her sister.

So he agreed; and at her request drove her through Moortown, she sitting back under the hood of the wagon, so as not to be seen. She bade Dick go and buy her a bonnet, and a bright little shawl she pinned over her bosom; so that, when she stepped out of the wagon, you would not have known her. And she did up her hood and old cloak in a bundle; "for she was powerful cunning." Then Dick got her some tea and food at a respectable woman's house he knew of. Lastly, he saw her into the mail-coach, which passed just at that hour through Moortown. And she had laughed in a pleased way to herself, and told Dick she was going to London, and perhaps to Paris; and had taken her seat with such a sensible, quiet way, like a fine lady in the way she spoke and demeaned herself, that Dick, groaning, declared it had quite relieved his conscience, believing she knew well enough how to take care of herself. After the coach was gone, he had to hurry back to the Red House, being late, and his horses were all of a lather—Master Blyth might recall speaking sharply to him about them, too.

That was all he could tell. Good Lord! he knew no more.

And, oh! (with a heart-rending groan) let no one ask him to give back the money; for it was all spent in drink or tobacco, or if not spent—Dick, fearing he was dying, writhed between the torments of his greed and his conscience—they might find some of it hidden in a hollow of the earthen floor, under one of the bed posts. But surely folk might leave it to him until he died, at least; for now he had told all, and cleansed his soul to the best of his power. Ah, Mistress Rachel need not look at him like that, with those eyes of hers, in reproach. He was only a miserable old man, who had meant no harm. Speak up for him, Miss Joy dear! and let him keep the money, for he loved it; and ask the young master—who was always cruel hard upon him—to let him die with a roof over his head.

This was Dick's confession.

"But, oh, how did my mother get all that money?" asked Joy, innocently, in wonder.

Blyth touched her gently, in secret signal not to inquire more then; for Rachel had clasped her hands to her head at that question. The girl had never been told that last dark detail of her father's flight from the cottage.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"Wenn Zwei von einander scheiden,
So geben sie sich die Händ;
Und fangen an zu weinen,
Und seufzen ohne End."

"Wir haben nicht geweinet,
Wir seufzten nicht 'Weh!' und 'Ach!'
Die Thränen und die Seufzer,
Die kamen hintennach."—HEINE.

A LOVER'S parting! It is hard and sad enough at all times, yet how much worse when it is not the will of a remorseless fate,

weighing equally heavy on both, but the deliberate wish of one who still loves, and is opposed by the other.

"You shall not go. I will not hear of it, Joy; I will not bear it! Or else I will grant this much—marry me first, and then go and search for your mother."

"Oh, Blyth! dear, dear Blyth! don't wring my heart with opposing me in this. How could I, a daughter, marry you and feel happy—marry and expect a blessing from Heaven on our union, if I had neglected or even delayed my first duty, to find my poor, unhappy mother?"

"But, Joy, think of me. Those two years I was out in Australia, I was only waiting, hoping for you, thinking of you. And now, when I come back and find happiness almost in my grasp, *almost!* to ask me to give it up! Any man would think this too hard."

"But I shall come back to you and the Red House, Blyth, if I live. Then remember my promise to my mother. She solemnly made me promise not to leave my Aunt Rachel *till she returned!* Oh, dear love, do you think *I* don't feel it too?"

"Don't cry, darling; that is like the last straw. What a miserable, tantalizing life it is on earth! Yes; you will come back, if it lies in your power—that I believe. But what changes and chances every day brings, especially in separation: illness, dangers, and troubles of all kinds, perhaps coldness and loss of affection. For there! you are beautiful, Joy—and you have not seen the world."

"I have not seen it. I am going out into it a poor, homeless, houseless wanderer, Blyth; searching for another strayed soul. And, if I thought you could trust me with as great trust and love as mine, dear, toward you, it would cheer me up; for perfect love, I have heard, casteth out fear. But if you doubt me, and distrust me, then—"

Poor Joy could not finish her words. Something seemed to rise up and down in her throat, as if her loving heart, swelled with pain and bitterness, was fluttering there.

Blyth felt heartily ashamed of himself.

Already, in this altercation, their first quarrel, he had said hard things that now seemed brutal to himself concerning Joy's father and mother. Her mother, even at the seasons when in full possession of her reasoning faculties, had never shown a right and natural maternal devotion to her daughter, he said. *His* father, George Berrington, had reared her, been a father to her for years; and, now the old man was declining, it was cruel to spoil his last happiness. What would he be without his beloved Joy in the house?

(And indeed she was the old man's pet; his last gleam of sunshine, so to speak; his adopted, dear daughter.)

But, in spite of all this, the girl's resolve to set out with her Aunt Rachel immediately in search of their poor wanderer was adamant to Blyth's anger. It hurt her cruelly, but she would not flinch.

So now, being ashamed of himself, feeling that in her self-sacrifice the woman was far braver and higher and nobler than himself, Blyth bowed his head and said, huskily,

"Then go, darling. I will not hinder you by another word. But God knows when you will come back to me!"

"Yes, God knows," answered the girl he loved, with a simple,

firm trust, as she echoed the words, that made him feel still more self reproved.

Blyth and Joy were together in the farm-parlor during this scene. It was the morrow after old Dick's strange confession, and the day was now wearing to late afternoon.

In the early morning Blyth had risen and ridden to Moortown, without waiting for breakfast or telling his purpose. He wished to make inquiries, as the mail-coach passed through Moortown that morning on its down journey, as to whether anything could be discovered further as to Magdalen's flight. When he rode back to the farm through a steady drizzling rain from the hills, Blyth carried the news that, so far as could yet be known, the woman described by him had certainly gone toward London. In his heart he then felt he had done what was right that morning, and deserved Joy's thanks, which were always so sweetly given. He struggled bravely against dim and evil promptings of the worser human nature that is in us all, which whispered that this future mother-in-law of his was like a clog round his neck; and that for *her own sake* as well as his happiness and that of her daughter, it was almost a pity she had been saved from the Blackabrook that night she ran off to the "cold country!" or, however horrible a fate, the poor soul might have had as peaceful an end, perhaps, had she indeed been sucked in living into the black mud of one of those dreary morasses to which the country folk gave the terrible name of the "stables of the moor." Better that than to be robbed and murdered, maybe, for her money in London.

Blyth was of a disposition that grudged no time or labor, provided a good result came to be shown for it. But it vexed him now to think how he had wasted a week's fine weather and the work of many men scouring the country far and wide for a woman who had got clear away—and old Dick, no doubt, laughing in his sleeve, the hoary villain!

Still, as he trotted Brownberry home, Blyth urged his lagging mind up to a dogged resolve on starting himself with Miss Rachel to London. He would not fail in his efforts to find Joy's mother now, at the end. Even their wedding might be delayed one week; for if, after a fortnight's fresh research, they could still discover no trace of Magdalen, well, then it would be a useless job trying further. Meanwhile, he would trust Joy to look after his father's health—ay, better than himself; while the old man would care *his* best for her, the darling.

Thus Blyth had all settled within his breast; then told his news and proposition to Rachel, who was out in the rain waiting for him down by the cottage (where Dick was still alive.) She had divined the young man's errand in her heart. She earnestly thanked him, but said no word more; neither to gainsay nor yet to approve. The poor man was dazed in her mind by want of sleep and the multitude of new thoughts that had whirled in her head through the night. She had only been able to tell herself that but one thing was clear—*her own duty*. Let Joy settle for herself; and Blyth with his heart. Rachel must not come between these lovers.

Joy, meanwhile, at the farm guessed, too, where Blyth was gone. But she did not go out, like her aunt, to wait in the rain. She had

much to do, to prepare, and direct; for if Hannah was the hands she was now the young head of the household.

After dinner, Blyth, seeing an anxious, set look, as of trouble, on Joy's face, no doubt with thoughts of her mother, fears succeeding relief, felt he could do no good, so had betaken himself to the fields. There was much to see to in person, if he was to go on his wild-goose chase so soon (but he only called it that very secretly; even within his own heart it seemed base toward Joy). By evening he came in, well soaked with the ceaseless rain. Not that he cared for a wet jacket. The true damper he felt was when Joy called him aside into the parlor, where no one would interrupt them, and told him, with many most loving, humble thanks for his offer, that yet she must go herself, and not he!

Now at that hour before supper, a man who has had a long ride in the morning, and done hard work all afternoon, and felt himself generous in his battlings with selfish promptings, does not feel in the mood to receive in the best manner disagreeable news.

Blyth did not bear opposition very well. He had something rugged in his nature; a far-away strain of fierce Northman's blood, inherited through long generations from his ancestors, that made him chafe when fate or others' wills crossed his; a different nature from the easy-tempered, indolent folk of those parts.

So now, though Joy had won the day, he was sorely vexed at heart.

There was silence in the parlor, for, it seemed, a long time. The tall clock standing in the corner ticked on. The rain still pattered down with ceaseless pertinacity. Blyth caught himself thinking sullenly that it would rain for days now, probably, and that he could do little good at work on the farm, and might as well be away; except that his old father was not strong enough for it to be right to leave him if Joy were gone. Several days' rain, and bad for delicate women to be journeying; while to the threshing his presence would make little difference. Says a well-known but defamatory rhyme of that moor-country,

"The west wind always brings wet weather,
The east wind cold and wet together:
The south wind surely brings us rain,
The north wind blows it back again."

Pitter, patter! drip, drip! And still Joy sat without stirring at one side of the large mahogany dinner-table, looking away out of the low, wide window fringed with her favorite creepers, whose wet tendril-fingers tapped the panes; her thoughts directed even far, far further than the distant gaze of her eyes.

And still Blyth Berrington, sitting at the end of the table, on which he had planted his elbow in a sturdy, aggrieved manner, rested his head in the hollow of his hand, watching her. He seemed to note as never before the details of the old room he had known from boyhood; for he was asking himself how it would look soon without that one figure to which his eyes always turned, wherever she might be, as to their center of attraction. The walls wainscoted in dark wood, the low ceiling, whitewashed, but crossed by beams of wood unspoiled by paint; the deep window recesses, with their cup-

board seats and heavy lattices, generally in fine days opened outward into the garden, while Joy's rose-leaves were dried on the sill.

It was a dark room, pleasant to him hitherto; it might easily become gloomy.

The heavy table filling all the center of the room shone with a mellow, dark glow, kindly answering to the care and frequent elbow-grease of many years. The same tale was silently told by the solid, square arm-chairs and the big sideboard on which stood some silver cups won at agricultural shows and at wrestling-matches. Two stuffed foxes' heads and some brushes, the spoils of his own youthful exploits, adorned the mantel-shelf. Some shelves of old-fashioned books, some on farriery, the others mostly godly, and that had belonged to his dead mother, represented the literature of the Berrington household.

Most comfortable; most respectable!

But of lightness, of color, of beautiful outline, or aught to cheer the eyes, what was there in the room but Joy herself—with her dark, glorious eyes, her rich complexion, the exquisite poise of her beautiful head, and the noble, easy grace of her figure as she sat there so still? She was like a splendid exotic flower, a tropical bright-plumaged bird, under a gray Northern sky—and she was going away! who knew for how long?

A sigh from Blyth broke the silence.

Joy started as if thrilled at the light sound.

"You are wet, you are all wet, Blyth, and I have been keeping you here. How selfish, how careless of me!"

"Never mind my wetting. It won't hurt me," curtly replied the young man, yet not ungraciously, rather with gruff resignation.

"Only I wanted to ask, Joy—if you must go on this unknown expedition—will you not want, or at least be helped, by some small loan, for your traveling and inquiries will cost money, you see. What is mine would have been yours in a fortnight, or one day less, dear, from now. Consider it yours beforehand, and let me feel I am giving that much share, if I'm not to do more, in the search."

Joy's cheeks glowed of a beautiful crimson for a few seconds.

"You were always so kind, always so generous!" (Ah! was he? That smote him in the conscience.) "But indeed we have been already far too much like the plagues of Egypt upon you. Aunt Rachel and I have got some money truly; enough to last us for some months."

"Plagues of Egypt! What an idea! More like the Israelites, who were a blessed people, for whom the plagues were sent because they were ill-treated. But excuse me, Joy, dearest, you can't have *much*."

"Indeed, dear Blyth, though I must not explain how, we have got a good deal. If it is not enough, then indeed I might borrow some, because I can repay it from my little fortune when I come of age."

"For some months—and then more? How long, in Heaven's name, do you suppose you will be away? A year?—say two years just as well! Well, well, well! I will say no more against it all."

Thereupon Blyth rose, and, walking heavily, went out of the room and up the shallow, dark stairs; each of his steps echoed dully by the beats in Joy's heart.

CHAPTER L.

"Each thing has its work to do, its mission to fulfill,
The wind that blows, the plant that grows, the waters never still.
Then need we ask, 'Have we a task?' 'Tis graven on each breast;
Then do life's duties manfully, and never mind the rest.

"Gentle words and kindly deeds are never thrown away,
But bring unlooked-for harvest on some cloudy autumn day.
We are but stewards of our wealth, of all by us possessed:
Then do life's duties manfully, and never mind the rest."—*Song*.

Joy had not wept, nor even shown much outward signs of grief, during her interview with Blyth. The unusual and strange consciousness of his being displeased and opposed to her wishes—to what she felt a sacred duty not to be argued about—had chilled her heart.

But now she rose too; slipping softly up to her own room, almost as if she were an ungrateful creature who had no longer right to go boldly about the old house that had sheltered her. She found Hannah, spectacles on nose, standing ponderously beside an open oak wardrobe, in which she was laying fresh lavender, with most tender fingers, on a delicate white dress lying folded on the shelf—Joy's wedding-gown!—while all around the room lay little piles of clothes, made ready for a journey.

"Oh, Hannah, Hannah!" And, without another word of explanation, down bent Joy, holding back her nurse's fat arms from continuing their work, and laid her face on the broad, faithful breast; where it had been so often come for refuge in childhood; murmuring now, and rubbing her head to and fro as if in pain.

"Oh, my doatie, my lamb! Sit down on that stool there, beside me. It's hard, it *is* hard on young hearts! But there, don't fret; Master Blyth may be a bit vexed now, but he'll think all the more of you for going, in the long run."

So Hannah babbled, in broken consolation, and often merely foolish ejaculations. But she *understood*, and her silliest fondness seemed to do Joy's foolish young heart more good at this weak moment than even Rachel's high example; who always herself felt that

"Because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence."

Rachel, at that moment, was praying, not packing. She was praying for guidance and protection on their journey, and uttering thanksgiving praises. She had little, indeed, to pack. She was kneeling at the seat of her open window, her eyes gazing at the far hills, while the tide of inexpressible thankfulness that filled her heart still surged high. She had been like a lone bird pining for the mate of her years of secluded captivity. Now—whatever might come more of new sorrow or cares for herself!—yet how joyfully would she take up her old beloved burden, at thought that Magdalen, her sister, had not been swallowed up quick as they that go down into the pit; that she might haply live to gaze steadfastly at the river of death with a clear mind, and pass down into it with a glad heart and singing.

As Rachel had perforce led a hermit's life, one who little by little forgets the common ways of men, so to her Joy's lot seemed so bliss-

ful in past and future, she had failed to notice the girl's small present trouble in disappointing her lover, displeasing old Berrington, and putting off her own wedding-day, that was so near, so near! for an indefinite time. The elder woman walked on lone heights in spirit; but the young girl down in the valley felt so earthly she could only look up thither, and humbly hope some day to climb higher herself.

But it must now be explained that it was old Hannah who had secretly provided the necessary expenses for the journey. In the first ten minutes that she heard of the projected plan, the good old soul had come secretly to Rachel and Joy as they consulted together, offering in a humbly joyful manner quite a large sum for their use. Law! it was only her wages she had put by in the savings bank all the years she was at the Red House. Call it a loan--what they pleased. They must take it, she insisted, bless their hearts! It was all left in her will to her darling Miss Joy, anyway. How could it be better spent than to assist in finding her dear lost mistress? Why, only that she would likely prove more hinderance than help, what with her age and weight and rheumatism, and being a necessity now to old Berrington and his wants, Hannah would gladly set forth once more herself.

Good Hannah! So she would; although so thankful these quiet years to be at rest. But indeed she weighed nearly sixteen stone now, and found it hard to move about with briskness, notwithstanding her still great strength; and she was short of breath from stoutness.

The three women had consulted together, and agreed that proper pride would forbid Rachel, and even Joy, from being beholden more deeply to the two Berrington men, unless it became quite necessary for poor Magdalen's sake. Both father and son had been so kind, so good for years, to the women and child who had taken refuge with them, that how could these latter now borrow from their purses to go on a journey which could bring little gladness to the good old farmer or to Blyth? For, alas! might not Magdalen in future raise fresh difficulties to the marriage, even in her sane seasons? Who knew? best not to think about it!

CHAPTER LI.

"La pauvre fleur disait au papillon céleste,
Ne fuis pas!
Vois comme nos destins sont différents, je reste,
Tu t'en vas!
Mais hélas! l'air t'emporte et la terre m'enchaîne
Sort cruel!
Je voudrais embaumer ton vol de mon haleine
Dans le ciel!
Mais non, tu vas trop loin! Parmi des fleurs sans nombre
Vous fuyez,
Et moi je reste seul à voir mon ombre
A mes pieds!

* * * * *

"Vivre ensemble, d'abord! c'est le bien nécessaire,
Et réel;
Après on peut choisir au hasard, ou la terre,
Ou le ciel."—VICTOR HUGO.

AND so the next afternoon Rachel Estonia was gone, with her young niece, the pride and darling of the Red House! Gone!

It had been raining all day as Blyth prophesied, heavy showers succeeding each other. But before they started the rain had ceased awhile, the sun shone out in a faint gleam on a dripping, misty, but sweet-scented moorland world, blue-black cloud-armies retreating, slowly rolling up their forces, over the hills, while a rainbow spanning half the vale gleamed in greeting to the departing travelers.

"See, dear Blyth," Joy whispered aside, pressing his arm. "It is a sign of hope, 'the bow in the cloud.'"

Blyth made an effort to smile upon her, but with poor success. The strong man felt tied hand and foot by withes that, however seemingly weak, yet he could not burst like Samson, for they were ties of filial affection toward his father. The old farmer, after appearing unwell all the day before, had a rather severe attack of illness in the night. But for this, Blyth would have insisted on going to London for a week with the two women, and giving them the protection of his presence and traveled experience, and (secretly) the help of his purse, though they should not know that. What could they, two helpless creatures, know of the means to be tried in such a case; how bear up against the weariness, rebuffs, trials, disappointments? And here was he, strong and able for the task, bound to stay in comfort under the old roof-tree!

There was no other course now possible. Blyth dared not leave his father alone in old age and sickness, even for the sake of his love.

And then Joy had sweetly tried to console him. It must all be for the best. Her mother might be tempted back by Rachel and Joy herself, but would only flee further from sight of Blyth, who had no lawful control over her either.

As to ways and means. "We will ask the police, as you say; and then—trust in Providence."

Concerning Rachel, she bade them farewell with prolonged and warmly grateful hand-clasps, but with few words and those deeply meant. Her dark eyes were shining as if they were fixed on a moving pillar of fire to guide her in their wanderings. She had no doubt of the success of their quest; but the when and where and how it all might end, *that* her faith did not seek to foresee!

Blyth had a carriage and horses hired from Moortown to take them away. That was all he could do; but neither the old gig nor his own new dog-cart were fit vehicles, he considered, for them on such a day; but, please the Fates, when Joy came back—

Then the farewells were over, and the carriage started down the lane, Joy looking back and smiling as long as she could see them. Hannah weeping loudly, but giving encouraging waves of a large pocket-handkerchief. Farmer Berrington on the other side of the gate (for he had insisted on coming out, though the air was so damp) giving dry sniffs and fetching wheezy sighs, with both hands planted on his staff.

Gone!

How different it was from the evening some fourteen years ago, when the farm-wagon had stopped at the gate, and set down a nurse and a little child! thought Blyth. He watched the carriage at every curve and winding of the lane at which he could still descry it; following it with troubled gaze from under his bent brows, his heart

heavy and growing cold within him. Yet surely they would return, perhaps, before a month was over; or in two months; or at latest by Christmas.

And then Blyth gave his arm to his old father, and helped him into the house.

Thus the elderly woman and the young girl went out into the highways of the great world, along its iron roads, and into the roar and hurry, the splendor and squalor, and crowded loneliness of its great cities.

They left the pleasant moorland valley, that had so long sheltered them, far away. And in a few days—what with the rush of new sights, sounds, and ideas, the excitement of their strange chase, the false hopes, disappointment, fluctuations of dull despair, struggles of reviving faith and energy, or brave efforts to hide fears from the other—both soon felt as if they had lived weeks since leaving the Red House on that sunlit, wet evening.

Both grew homesick, and both would have been heartsick, but for finding now and again they were on the right track; that duty was leading them, although through devious ways and difficulties, on the same path as the will-o'-the-wisp soul they were pursuing; stray news coming to cheer them, like the *ignis-fatuus* light.

CHAPTER LII.

Der Herbstwind rüttelt die Bäume,
Die Nacht ist feucht und kalt;
Gehüllt im grauen Mantel,
Reite ich einsam im Wald.

“Und wie ich reite, so reiten
Mir die Gedanken voraus;
Sie tragen mich leicht und lustig
Nach meiner Liebsten Haus.”

“Es säuselt der Wind in den Blättern,
Es spricht der Eichenbaum;
‘Was willst du thörichten Reiter,
Mit deinem thörichten Traum?’”—HEINE.

THE autumn slowly waned in the Chad valley, while, as Victor Hugo has sung of his own land, “the rain and the sun seemed to have rusted the woodlands.” And still Joy had not come back to the Red House.

Days grew shorter, darkness longer; the lanes were muddy, the hedges black and dripping; rains were heavy and mists rolling; the cold came creeping in, and on and on, till it took the air, and the surface of the earth, and held the world fast in its grip. And yet, even when a white Christmas came—a fine old-fashioned one, as people said, when icicles and snow made pleasanter good cheer and roaring fires within doors, such as the farm was famous for—Joy returned not!

Farmer Berrington was more or less ailing and helpless all that winter. Again and again, when Blyth, hoping the old man was better, made all his preparations ready in secret to be off for a week’s hasty traveling to see Joy again, and hear her dear voice, if only for

a day, and perhaps be of help to her too, so surely did some fresh attack silently shatter his plans. Young Berrington once more had to take up for days the hard part to a man of prolonged care of the sick, of soft words and gentle footfall.

Blyth was an excellent son and a most tender nurse. Rich though he now was, he yet would let no hired attendant sleep in his old father's room at nights, but himself undertook that wearisome duty. George Berrington had been a good father to his motherless boy, and Blyth felt now, after his own absence in Australia, the wish to do only far, far more for him. A man can do so little, he thought, a woman so much in a thousand little words and acts!

If Joy could but have stayed—

Nevertheless the young man did his best nobly; bore patiently with the little whims and querulousness with which weary weakness will torment most poor sick creatures. He learned to subdue his own temper hourly, to make his own love of self-will give way even against reason, to soften not only his own words if a trifle rough, but also his voice and manner. As to his heart, that was always tender and pitiful enough beneath the slight upper crust of hardness and selfishness that grows upon men often, especially when left alone in youth to struggle in the battle of life. He chafed like a strong horse obliged to go at a snail's pace.

"But it's done him good," soliloquized Hannah, to herself, in a low tone, sometimes; as she would stop bustling in the spotless, shining cleanliness of her kitchen, and peer, with her wise little old eyes, out of the window.

There would go Blyth, perhaps, kept in most of the afternoon waiting for the doctor's visit; and now striding away on some dark, wet evening, glad to expand his chest and give his muscles play at last in a long walk over the hills; while the strong air, however damp-laden, blew like gusts of fire and exhilaration into his face.

"He'll be all the better man when she comes back. To be rich and young and strong makes a man's heart so lifted up, till he thinks himself lord over all those about him and a pet of Providence. And *he's* like a nut, hard outside but sweet when you crack it. Ah, he's learning now that to have got all his money in Australia isn't everything."

Blyth, an hour later, standing meditatively down the Chad valley, would have doubtless agreed with Hannah's last words. He would be most likely looking over the mossy parapet of the second bridge down the river from their farm. The swollen river, after winding in loops through the narrowed valley up which he gazed, here foamed, white and shallow, over a wear, filling his ear with brawling noise. The hills on either side looked steep and black and lowering, clothed with underwood and copse that now was brown and shaggy and leafless. With Joy all the summer's softening influence and beautiful hues seemed fled from the rugged nature around.

And yet Blyth loved his home as much as ever. Even this wintery evening had its charms for him, as he watched idly the intensely deep indigo hue of the great clouds overhead showing that a storm was brewing; then the white water hurrying seaward below him; and the wet, pallid green of the little flat valley with red rocks out-

cropping here and there from the hills that rose close on either hand.

Bestirring himself, he would resolve to walk round over the ground he had now bought from old Hawkshaw. A hill with a fine oak-wood he had coveted from his boyhood, and then some fat fields, a meadow, and, lastly, rounding the hill and touching the old Red Farm land, a dell that Joy had always loved and sometimes strayed into.

The sward was always short and green here, even though rough and wet with winter growth, while some white rocks pushing their shoulders out through the wood were laced with ivy trails. Hawthorns stood scattered through the dell, deep russet with haws; others as white as if they had caught and kept the morning mist, or the wool of several sheep hanging on them in a pall. This strange sight, almost like snow in a dull twilight, was from the twining traveler's joy whose hoary winter seeds made gray-beards of the trees.

"Here," thought Blyth, "I will make a drive for her, following the hollow of the ground up to the Red House. Yonder shall be the gate leading out on the Moortown high-road. If it could only be done now by magic before she comes back; and I would drive in here with her by my side, and my darling would say it was a pleasant demesne to live in all one's days."

By no magic, though by men's good labor, the road through the dell was made by early spring; and yet no young mistress passed up it.

There was a new horse for Joy that Blyth himself had carefully trained through the long winter, whinnying in the stable. A new wagonette stood beside the old shabby gig, waiting for Blyth to mount its front seat some day with Joy at his side, while there was capacious room behind for old Mr. Berrington, and Rachel too—if she would.

But the spring had stolen imperceptibly into summer, and once more the hay stood high and crested; the cuckoo called by day, and the night-jar and landrail were heard at night. And still Rachel was far away, abroad; keeping the sunshine of the farm with her, the life and gladness of the house.

So old George Berrington grumbled, adding he had short time left on earth, maybe; and that it seemed hard. Blyth sighed audibly, but said nothing.

Up spoke Hannah at that, fired in the defense of the absent and her sex, sharply rebuking them both.

"You're better than you were last December, Mr. Berrington, now that the swellings of your legs has eased your chest; and who knows but what you may long outlive Miss Rachel yet, who's had troubles enough, the dear knows: to kill a dozen men. Why should you both grudge the poor soul what is just, I believe, the happiest time of her hard, hard life? It's like a mother who has been separated always from her own child (for Miss Joy has been like that to her), and who has her at last all to herself, by her side. They're traveling a hard road, and on a task which Him who made us only knows whether it will be for their own happiness or chastisement, if they *do* succeed. But never you fear, Miss Joy isn't fretting. She

knows her call in life is to cheer them that most want it. Be thankful, both of you men, that your lives have been, and are still, passed in ease and plenty; if even, at the end, you have to want something you desire, master."

Both the Berringtons took Hannah's words well, though each after his own fashion. Old Berrington kept more silence from repinings. Blyth threw redoubled energy into his work, in improving, altering, and beautifying the farm and the Red House itself.

With the fine weather had come sounds of masons' tools, carpenters' hammers, clinking and driving all day long. Not a plank, brick, or nail of the pleasant old house should be altered, so Blyth assured his father. But some more rooms were added, in design matching the fine ancestral homestead so excellently well that the Red House of former days seemed not only spread more substantially, but as quaint-looking as ever. And these were rooms for Joy: airy and sunny, lined to be a nest fit for such a bright bird of delicate parentage.

CHAPTER LIII.

"I wander east, I wander west,
Where'er my fancy guides me;
And laugh and sing, and care nothing,
If weal or ill betide me.
Once—was it long, long years ago,
Or yesterday?—
I had a dream that some one cared
For me—well-a-day!"—*Song.*

WHAT of Rachel Estonia and Joy meanwhile?

A year found them wandering still, and still in vain, from town to town, after the elusive *feu-follet* that ever flitted before them—a lost soul, indeed, according to the old superstition.

They had not been without some gleanings here and there of actual news of poor, wayward Magdalen on her erratic course.

In London, the police discovered for them, after some time, that she had left before they arrived. She had gone to a quiet hotel, where she called herself by her rightful name of Countess of Rivello. Rachel and Joy listened breathlessly to the account from the very lips of those who had seen her; of how quiet and winning the "foreign lady" had been in her manner, though a little whimsical in her dress. Very restless she was only in this, that morning, noon, and evening she must always be driving about or walking. "She wanted a hundred eyes to see all the sights with," she said. At nights, she complained that sleep only came to her if she was quite tired out.

Presently her loneliness in "London, that great sea," seemed to weary the countess. She told the people of the hotel, vaguely, of having left friends behind her in the country, who liked its dullness; but for her, she was tired of gray skies and green fields, and wanted to enjoy a little gayety, movement, life. London had grown dull and stupid of late years, she said: it used to be so different! She should go to Paris!

To Paris they followed her, and through France. Then said

Rachel, with a sudden inspiration, "She will go to Genoa; to our old home there." It was so indeed!

Magdalen had been there before them: had stood once more on the echoing marble halls of the old palace, the place whereof knew her no more. She had turned away light as thistledown blown by the wind. It was dreary there, she said, but Italy was bright and gay outside, and she was happy. She was happy! they repeated, looking wonderingly at each other; she had not said *that* for years.

But to Rachel her father's home gave a thousand silent welcomes to the daughter whose happiest days had been spent there, listening to his words of wisdom, fostered by maternal love. And to Joy she told a thousand memories of those dear dead ancestors, whom the girl thus learning to imagine and know by her loving description, in their own stately chambers and amid those beautiful associations, thenceforth learned to revere and think of with such affection that she believed she should recognize them by instinct as having been of her own kindred on earth when, in some future blissful state, they might meet her face to face.

Those months were a wonderful education to Joy. Her mind was drinking in all it saw with keen delight; for albeit her zeal to find her mother slackened no less than Rachel's, yet her eyes perforce took in at every glance beauties of sights and scenery she had never before imagined.

Oh, the glorious "roof of blue, Italian weather!"

Who could long be unhappy under such a sky? Surely, thought Joy, knowing her mother's light spirit unfettered by thoughts of duties left behind or the anxieties of those who loved her, surely *she* was happy too. She had said so. Every additional scrap of news, discovered with difficulty, described her as rambling wayward but wildly gay, it seemed, past classic marbles and lemon-groves, where Florence basked under her hills, and on, on, still straying south, through towns once famous and stirring, now still as in a noon-day siesta.

"Let us go straight to Rome. We shall find her there," both the lips of the loving ones who followed her agreed.

So they went to Rome, the mother city whose mysterious influence has drawn travelers through so many ages to herself—but Magdalen was not there. They turned back, seeking her, and then, once more getting on her track, found she had gone there as they went away!

Back to Rome with the new year they hurried, with beating hearts, every hour, every minute, expecting to meet Magdalen face to face round some street corner; settling how gently they would greet her, as if nothing unusual lay in such a meeting. They feared to frighten her now by making many inquiries.

It seemed that Magdalen had somehow become aware she was being followed. For when last they heard with their own ears intelligence from a peasant woman with whom she had actually lodged in a village of the Alban Hills, the poor soul had been only fitfully gay, at other times nervous and suspicious, hinting at being pursued by unknown, mysterious enemies. She was so cunning, too, that at the least alarm she would most likely dart away and elude their grasp.

But to-night, or else to-morrow morning, or certainly on the following evening, they would meet her by some fountain, or in a garden, or among the grand ruins of the Rome of the Cæsars.

She would not be frightened at them—no! now their task was indeed almost at an end!

Joy learned fresh lessons of heart and head she never forgot in those long weeks of search; but, above all, in those last few days of excited waiting and hope, Rachel Estonia was her silent teacher. Never too eagerly elated, nor cast down in the bitterest moments when her hopes proved fruitless for the thousandth time; steadfast, sweet, and living, however weary, she walked as one who knows not, asks not, why her path should be so full of difficulties; but, cheered and guided by faith, still presses on her way, undoubting that all is for the best.

So three or four days passed in vain. Then, one evening, they heard Magdalen's voice!

It was after sunset and already dusk and cold, so that both the women watchers had wrapped themselves against the chill night air. By staying at home they could do no good in their quest, and feeling that Magdalen, with her constant craving for air and movement, was sure to be abroad even when the Romans would be indoors, they stole out together.

They were passing down a street, being anxious to gain the better-lighted Piazza di Spragna, for here the gleam of only a few lamps fought with the dark shadows thrown by projecting buildings. Here and there open church-portals revealed glimpses of interiors where dreamy lights, music, and incense might still be seen and heard, for some special services were being performed, contrasting strangely with the barking and quarreling of street dogs that were ravenously searching the dust-heaps for offal, while making night hideous with their clamor.

On a sudden, Joy, who had a quicker musical ear than Rachel, caught her aunt's arm, whispering.

"Stop; listen! That is my mother's voice singing."

As you shall hear a bird's note trilling above all the bustle and roar of a street, so they distinguished now, to the accompaniment of a few chords struck on a mandolin, Magdalen's very tones singing, as of old, the Indian song they had so often heard,

"Taza be taza,
No be no."

A few words followed, as both listened spellbound. No more!

Then Rachel raised her voice in a clear call.

"*Magdalen! Magdalen!* It is I, Rachel, calling you. Come to me."

No answer came back.

They rushed across the street through the darkness, heedless of jostling passers by, of fruit-carts and flower-baskets, against which they stumbled. Where she had been? Alone there in some one of those dark houses, at a balcony; or down here on the footway? They had not been able to distinguish from the sounds. Rachel and Joy tried hither and thither: searched and asked and waited up

and down for long, till only utter exhaustion drove them at last lingeringly away to rest awhile before dawn—all, all in vain!

When, in despair, daughter and sister applied for help and information to the authorities, there was long waiting before it was tardily found that the street-singer they sought had some time since disappeared.

A street-singer? Impossible!

Nay, it was true. She did not make her livelihood altogether thereby, but seemed to eke out slender means. A foreigner she was, of what country none precisely knew, but she called herself Maddalena. A woman who seemed of middle age by her profuse gray hair, but younger in mind, as gay and lightly pleased as a child. But also she was quick, shifting, never to be depended on, and dangerous in her sudden tempers. She was *gone! gone!* Yes, very certainly; but none knew whither.

But to loving hearts how much is not possible?

The two women guided only by some blind guess at truth, something in their hearts seeming to whisper that was right, tracked her to Naples. Thence, after a short rest, Magdalen had started northward, seemingly in ill-health and daily poorer. With what difficulty they slowly followed! now taking a wrong route and having to retrace their steps, now overshooting the mark in a right direction. But after some weeks all trace seemed lost.

A whole month they waited near where Magdalen's last footsteps had certainly passed. One steadily, one eagerly, the young girl and the elder woman examined carefully every track, watched for any clew; finding many kind hearts and much sympathy.

At last came a message from where a little town lay clinging to a steep hillside among olives. A good priest there had taken in the poor wanderer, footsore, hungry, and ill. Her brain had become distracted, but she had been pitifully dealt with, most kindly nursed. And the warm, simple hearts had grown fond of her, she had such a light charm and helpless but coaxing ways, like a petted child masquerading in the body of one of its elders.

She was still white and weak, but able to sing again to the accompaniment of a little mandolin she carried, when one spring morning (as all the earth seemed bursting into flower) they found that in the night past she had slipped away.

Without a word of farewell, ungrateful one! But may the saints protect the poor innocent! She was not to be blamed for aught she did.

The months that followed were spent in fresh journeyings and inquiries made from town to town under the Alps. But no sign, no faintest trace, now ever came to stir Joy's warm, impulsive heart to fresh energies and hope, or to cheer in the least Rachel's more resigned spirit. The latter seemed wandering in the desert without a well of water anywhere, or palm-tree to rest and refresh her. But for Joy's love now she would have broken down; her mind turned often to lean on the younger one for comfort. Dark doubts came in the lone watches, whispering that she had been given but one charge and care on earth, and had lost it! That at the end of her trial she had been found wanting; was a careless, unloving sister; a faithless servant.

The bravest pilgrim of life may suffer such temptings and torments, when the journey is already almost well ended.

In those days, in the darkest of those hours, the gleam of Joy's smile and her voice, even her laugh, broke the spell; and Rachel would lift up her voice to bless her in heart.

At last, when the fiercest summer heats came, and both women drooped in their task, and had begun to look silently at each other with almost hopeless but still patient eyes, there arrived an urgent letter from Blyth Berrington.

"Come back, if only for two days," he wrote to Joy. "My father is very ill and wishes to see you; he thinks it may be for the last time."

The girl's tears fell like warm rain as she thought of the kind old man who had been a true father to her in her childhood.

"Surely I can go, now—at last?" she appealed to Rachel, as if distrusting the quick beats of her own heart.

"Go! We must go, of course," replied Rachel, surprised, as if a priestess had heard a divine call doubted by a young attendant in the temple. "Yes, I am going with you. We are no longer required to stay here, I believe; and there we are needed."

CHAPTER LIV.

"Tell me, gentle traveler, thou
Who hast wandered far and wide,
Seen the sweetest roses blow,
And the brightest rivers glide;
Say, of all thine eyes have seen,
Which the fairest land has been?
 shall I tell thee where
Nature seems most blest and fair,
Far above all climes beside?
'Tis where those we love abide;
And that little spot is best
Which the loved one's foot hath pressed."

The Rose-garden of Persia.

"EAST and west, home's best," says the proverb. Joy felt that true, in every tingling pulse, as once more she saw the well-known towers rising one after another against the sky into view; and as she rejoiced in the wild freshness of the moorland, reviving her jaded senses and mind wearied by hasty traveling. And when the twisted chimneys of the Red House came in sight, and its glittering vanes, even from afar her heart leaped to greet them.

There was home to her where Blyth Berrington dwelt!

They had hastened back, fearing to be too late. But Blyth met them at Moortown, and said, in his first greeting,

"My father is still alive. The doctors say he cannot recover, but that he has lasted so wonderfully against all their experience, he may still hold his ground for some days."

How strange it was to Blyth that here was Joy again by his side, as he had planned; seeing the new lands by the windings of the Chad that now owned a Berrington as master; and admiring with honest, unspoiled gladness, like a child almost, all the wonders and

additions that had improved, but not changed, the dear old house one bit, so she declared. It was not the home-coming he had dreamed of. For however often and lovingly they would turn to look each other in the eyes (and that at the same moments, almost always, by some strange mutual prompting), yet there was a weight of sadness on their faces, and they smiled each to each in the sad way that says, "We *could* be so happy now, if—!"

No; are such meetings again, as most things planned and looked forward to too eagerly, ever *quite* what imagination dreamily and delightfully pictured? Happy they who have least imagination, when the inevitable disappointment comes.

Blyth had a steady fancy, luckily for himself. He felt so humbly glad to have his Joy back that he cared little how she came, so long as she cared for him.

And she did care; she loved him, so her own soft lips told him that evening under the low-spreading, great elm-tree, where the bench was, in the old close, now a lawn; loved him as well—yes, and far better than ever.

"But how long are we still to be parted, dear?" asked Blyth, holding firmly the main point within his mind in view. "A year has gone that we have passed away from each other! That is lost to both of us! No, I must not say lost to you, for you have grown even far more beautiful, though I could not have believed that possible before. And you have a new air, too, as if a princess had come back to our old farm."

"Oh, Blyth, I have not heard such flattery all the months I have been away! That is new to you—and you are changed in other ways, too. But," her warm, red lips laughing prettily up at him, not to seem accusatory of his past, "I really believe it is an improvement!"

Joy felt, but knew not yet how to describe what came to her intuitively by woman's quick divining, forestalling experience, that Berrington was in much a different man; softened in his pride of strength, youth, and good-fortune; more patient and thoughtful for others, and forbearing.

Blyth paid her for her praises; which, however, she had not altogether foreseen. Then he repeated his question,

"Joy, dearest, promise me that now you *have* come back, we two shall not be parted any more."

The girl sighed and looked round as if for counsel to the well-beloved trees, the valley and river, but all seemed to echo Blyth's request, "Do not leave us, Joy; do not leave us!"

"It seems so strange that we mortals should so often talk of not being parted any more," she murmured. "Why, see how death comes, or misfortune of all kinds, and, against their will and vows, those who love best, and have had, perhaps, very little time to be happy, are sundered. The only thing we can be sure of having in life is some duty, it seems to me; and there is a satisfaction in fulfilling it that is certain, too, though it may not be happiness. Well, our duty now is to see to your father, Blyth. Let us wait till later to talk about ourselves."

A week later the two lovers were out rambling once more together. It was afternoon; and while Rachel stayed in-doors by old Mr.

Berrington, who was sleeping, Blyth and Joy, who had both sat up several nights watching in the sick-room, were glad to go out for fresh air and a little while of each other's company alone.

They had strayed down into the newly bought fields.

How warm it was! but with a fresh wind rustling the branches of the elms in the great hedgerows they passed under, skirting the wheat that stood green and as high already as Joy's waist. Here and there, through the gaps, could be seen peeps of the distant sun-lit hills, lying free and uncultured, fleeting shadows passing over them like light thoughts.

And ever and again, as the breeze drove the clouds by overhead they would see what Joy loved, how

"a ripple of shadow
Runs over the whisperous wheat."

Then Blyth spoke once more.

Farmer Berrington was no worse, but indeed marvelously retaining his strength in a stout-hearted way against the grim enemy. The doctors had given him up. Good nursing was all that could now be of any little service to him, they said, shaking their heads in kindly dolorousness. Good nursing the old man now truly had since Joy returned, with Rachel to help her; though he loved best to see his "beauty, his daughter to be, with her voice drawn out as fine as a bell-wire, and as sweet as a flute," he slowly uttered, with admiring affection.

And, lo, and behold! instead of turning his face to the wall, and being gathered to his fathers by now, as was prophesied, old George Berrington was, somehow, no worse—nay, so incredibly better, that Blyth had to check his own lightheartedness, for it was indeed "too good to be true."

"Now, we may allow ourselves to consider our own future a little," he pleaded of his love. "Surely—surely, Joy, dearest, our two lives need not always be sacrificed to following a wraith! You might as well try to catch one of those shadows on the hillside yonder—"

"Our lives need not be *always* sacrificed, as you say, Blyth," replied the beautiful dark girl beside him, slowly, with slightly quivering lips. "If—if, say in two years from now, we have not found my mother, then I will come to you as your wife—if you still wish to have me."

"In *two years*! Good heavens, darling, you must be joking with me. You do not seriously think it necessary to wander for two whole years longer on such a wild, hopeless task—when all trace and chance is lost too!" uttered Blyth, aghast.

"It is almost hopeless, indeed; a tangled skein!" whispered Joy, low, not having strength of heart enough at that moment to speak louder.

It was hard indeed, with Blyth's arm round her waist, and his handsome face looking down in hers, appalled; sorrowful reproach in his blue eyes, as he stood stock still on hearing her words in the narrow path between the tall wheat and the shady, high hedgerow.

Then she looked aside, her own eyes full of pain; and somehow she noticed just there how red the poppies were that burned in

crimson spots through the green waving army of wheat spears that, rustling, overtopped them. And was that a woodpecker in the deep oak-wood yonder, tap-tapping?

All the while—it was but for a few silent seconds—the poor girl was aware, in a vague way, that she must cling fast to a resolve taken some time back in her own mind. There was pain in holding to the duty, abnegation; and so somehow she seemed trying to divert her own inner self, as if it were a different being, by noticing the outer landscape and sounds. How often again, in later years of her life, she remembered those poppies, and the summer scene; recalled the past pain, and could hear the wood-pecker plying his trade so busily, once more!

So Joy did not finish her sentence.

“It pains you too? You don’t wish truly to part from me for all this weary while?” Blyth exclaimed, seeing only her face, not what was passing in her heart; and he passionately drew Joy close to him, her head resting on his broad breast. A moment or two Joy so stayed still, then, raising her face, she murmured,

“It pains me, but I *must* go! Were it only for Aunt Rachel’s sake I must go, not to leave her so lonely. When I am with her, she says every fresh root we sleep under on our wanderings is home to her. Think of her desolate and disappointed, she who is a saint on earth. Oh, Blyth, if you love me, don’t tempt me!”

“I won’t! I won’t! not to leave her entirely. But think of my old father, Joy! you are the light of his eyes. Marry me first, darling—put up the bans next Sunday. He will be satisfied in his old age; and when you have stayed with us a little while the dear old man will be either laid to sleep in peace, or else so much better that you and I will go on our travels together. There! let me have one kiss and say you will meet me half-way.”

Thus Blyth uttered in return hurriedly, and, not waiting for Joy’s assent, he had just sealed the compact on one side, thinking to secure victory, when the sound of some one coughing violently at a little distance made both start,

CHAPTER LV.

“Weep, foolish heart,
And, weeping, live,
For death is dry as dust; yet if ye part,
End as the night, whose sable hue
Your sins express, melt into dew.”

G. HERBERT.

BLYTH and Joy looked all round, but only the wheat-field and the waving branches of the elms were to be seen, or had descried them. Nevertheless, with a sober and demure air they proceeded along the narrow footpath; Joy feeling specially guilty because the *no* in her heart had not yet been uttered with which she must have frozen the kiss that was so warm on her lips.

At the corner of the field was a stile, the path leading to which ran at right angles with theirs, so that the thickness of the tangled hedge row had completely hid the lovers from any indiscreet eyes approaching.

A young man was trying to get over the stile as they came up. Or, rather, he seemed so ill that, being taken with weakness in the very act, he was supporting himself on the top bar.

Joy almost gave a scream of surprise as she saw him.

It was Steenie Hawkshaw; but looking like a ghost in a living man's clothes. Deathly white, with cheeks so hollow that the skin seemed drawn over them with difficulty, only his eyes being wonderfully brightened and larger, and his cheek-bones tinged with a round, red flush in deceptive appearance of health, the poor fellow was coughing again as if the fit would rack him to pieces.

"Oh, Blyth, help him; he may fall!" exclaimed Joy, with a woman's quick pity.

More slowly, man-like, Blyth had come forward, not liking to seem forcing aid on any one. But now, urged by that dear voice of divine sympathy, he held out his arm like a strong bar for support, saying simply, in an honest, kindly way,

"Just take hold of me till you get down, will you, Hawkshaw? That cough of yours would shake any man."

As Blyth thus stood quite close to the stile, Steenie collected himself. He had seemed ready to faint, and his brow was damp with bead-drops, but a faint flush now overspread his features, and, summoning all his remaining strength, he struck Blyth in the face with his wasted, nerveless fist.

"There! that's for you and your help," he gasped, with excited, working features. "Take that in return for the day we met at Drewston."

Joy had grown crimson with fury at the insult, for her lover's sake. But Blyth, though he had stepped back a pace, forbore to show a sign of anger, after the first quick stare. He said, very quietly,

"I will take that and another blow besides, Hawkshaw, if in your conscience you think it right for you to give and me to receive. God judge between us as regards the poor, hunted woman that caused our quarrel!"

There was a minute's silence. Steenie Hawkshaw had succeeded in getting down from the stile unaided, though he was so weak that he tottered. Then another fit of coughing came on, so bad he had to hold his head, and it made them ache with pity to hear him. When it was over, Hawkshaw laid his head against the top bar and sobbed.

Blyth and Joy watched him, feeling quite stricken with pity, and, as it were, ashamed of being so well and strong themselves. Had Steenie died then and there in the field they would hardly have been surprised, so near the end of his life did he seem. Bodily weakness had overpowered him, besides the reaction after the impulse of his anger against Blyth. Then the forgiving manliness of the latter, added to who knew what stings of his own conscience about Magdalen, that had long tortured him, increased on seeing Joy, had broken down the poor wretch's pride utterly.

Ashamed of himself, he stopped, with an effort to laugh.

"Well, you've the best of me, Berrington. I'm dying; and, if not, I'd have been disinherited, any way, for a wretched, puling baby up there at the Barton. Ha, ha—that's how the world goes."

He could not stir yet; hardly speak. Joy pitifully bent over him and wiped the damps from his brow with her handkerchief.

Hawkshaw suffered her to do it, then spoke, with some relenting in his bitterness.

"You don't grudge me going through these fields, perhaps, Berrington. This path was sometimes said to be a public one, though we tried to stop its being used."

"You are welcome to it, at all events," answered Blyth, gravely. "But will you do either of two things? Let me give you my arm back to the Barton, for you are not strong enough to be left by yourself; or, if you can get as far as the Red House, I'll drive you back myself."

Without a word, Hawkshaw looked Blyth in the face awhile.

Then he slowly said,

"I'll do neither; but I believe you're a good sort, after all. And, if I could live the past time over again, we might have been friends. Well, no matter now! But still I may be able to do you both a good turn. Have you been to the fair at Moortown to-day?"

"No," said Blyth, wondering. He had sent his farm-bailiff, though, and his thoughts flashed at once to wondering what foolishness that individual could have been about; although supposed a very superior successor to old Dick, who was now bedridden and in a state of dotage.

"Go both of you, then, and see the traveling show. There's an evening performance. I went last night, and—though I couldn't be sure—I hardly slept afterward thinking of what I saw there. *You go especially!*" (to Joy) "If you don't, you may regret it to your dying day."

His two listeners tried to make Hawkshaw speak more distinctly on the subject in his mind, by natural queries, objections, surmises.

But Steenie would by no means say more than—

"Go, I tell you, go! I never supposed two fine, traveled people like you both would care the snuff of a candle for the show; but still you go. Wait for the waxworks to be opened—never mind the other performances, the puppet-show and the fat boy and Zulus, a lot of them—you watch for the music in the waxwork tent. Good-by. I make no promise, for I may be all wrong—I couldn't be sure. But just you go and see."

With which oracular words, and no more explanation vouchsafed, Steenie left them slowly, leaning on a stick heavily, and every now and then stopping to rest and watch the yellow butterflies fluttering by, and the darting swallows in mid-air, with a sort of envy.

Blyth and Joy watched him a little, then, seeing he was better, and apparently able to take his own way back, both looked at each other.

"What does he mean?" asked Joy, her woman's curiosity all alive.

"I don't know," answered Blyth, musing. "But we had better go and see."

CHAPTER LVI.

“The first company that passes by,
 Say na, and let them gae;
 The next company that passes by,
 Say nae, and do right sae;
 The third company that passes by,
 Then I'll be ane o' thae.
 First let pass the black, Janet,
 And syne let pass the brown,
 But grip ye to the milk-white steed,
 And pu' the rider down.”

The Young Tamlane.

THE sun was setting behind the Moortown hills as Blyth drove Joy up to the little town.

There was a small square in the middle of the town, in which stood an old market cross, raised on three tiers of steps. And round this central spot—a strange contrast—were pitched seven large yellow wagons.

These blocked up the little side-streets, one leading from the gray church with its low tower, and another from the almshouses, and another ending the road up from the valley. The traffic was choked, and the country crowd, wedged into narrow space, seemed multiplied. The tops of the great vans were on a level with the little bedroom windows above the butcher's and baker's and grocer's shops, and even obscured those of the “Three Crowns Inn.”

The evening air was noisy with the braying of a brass band attached to the great show, and preluding one of the various performances which succeeded each other. Mingled with this came the baaing of many sheep on the air, that were being driven away in different flocks; the good-humored and sleepy voices of fat farmers standing about the inn door in groups, broken by an occasional great laugh; the excited calls of the village gossips, noise of children, and disregarded coarse shouts of “Aunt Sally” and “shies-at-a-cocoa-nut” men, whose mean baits were altogether outdone by the big yellow caravan, which combined so many attractions in itself.

As Blyth Berrington, after putting up his dog-cart at the “Three Crowns,” escorted Joy through the good-humored crowd of sight-seers, the business of the day was over, the fun of the little fair in full swing.

Here was one yellow house on wheels, with the hideous fat lady, who resided squeezed therein, portrayed outside; resembling much, apparently, a Yorkshire pig. If, by chance, she moved one of the blinds for air before the tiny windows of the carriage-house in which she was boxed, or that, by chance, a glimpse of a stout bare arm could be seen, the excitement of the children outside, who could not afford to pay their pennies, knew no bounds. There was the popping of a shooting-gallery also to be heard in a different direction; another wagon had disgorged a movable wooden stage, on which marionettes had lately been put through their puppet dance; while some last sounds of most hideous clamor in a tent signified that

some "real Zulus" were just ending their native war dance, hoarse with shouts, and no doubt leg-weary, to judge by the violent stamping that shook the protruding boards of their temporary ball-room.

Blyth and Joy passed all these attractions, and went toward the waxworks, as directed. The show was not yet open.

Feeling a little foolish, and still curious, yet prepared by their own anticipation for disappointment, they conversed together in whispers upon Steenie Hawkshaw and his mysterious words; tried to pretend interest in the scene around; and half thought of driving straight home again to the Red House.

"These good people are all looking at us, and wondering what we are here for. If I thought it was a hoax—" said Blyth, half-gruffly, feeling uncomfortable in the situation.

"Oh, no, no; any one so ill as Steenie was would not hoax. Having come so far, we must see what there is to be seen," pleaded Joy, whose curiosity, though mixed with doubts, had only grown with the delay.

At that moment the brass band struck up again. The evening show of the waxworks was about to open.

The largest yellow wagon, which had unroofed itself, now let down a row of flap-shutters from its sides, displaying behind these a striking portrait gallery of the queen and all her ministers, both in and out of office, with strict impartiality. The floor of the wagon became a platform, on which the effigies of six gilded knights apparently brayed from trumpets, while very real, untuned sounds came from a group of mortal musicians behind them.

"Walk up, walk up, lady," cried a red-faced showman, with a tall hat stuck much on one side of his head, perceiving Joy's beautiful face under her shady gypsy bonnet. "Walk up, and the gen'l-man will be 'appy to pay for you, I'll be bound." Then, in a hoarse-whispered shout to another assistant at the back, "I say, Bill, make room there inside. Here's a couple of real *huppers* coming."

Blyth and Joy found themselves mingling with a crowd of better-class sight-seers, all eager to partake of the atmosphere of art and refinement in this department of the "traveling exhibition," reported to be much superior in its elegance to the other more vulgar entertainments in its company.

They stumbled up some wooden steps on to the platform, stumbled down more on the other side, and found themselves inside a dark tent, surrounded by mysterious curtains.

The showman now seized a long whip, and, as prelude, gave it a sharp flick over the heads of a group of Moortown children, whom he transfixed with his eye.

"Do I hear a noise there; chattering and disturbing ladies and gents, besides all this assembled company? I'll turn you all out, every one, next minute—this instant—and return you your money, at half-price. Money indeed! What do I care about money? Elegant behavior's the thing for *these* waxworks."

The frightened children had been as mum as mice, huddled together; but flick! went the whip a second time over their innocent heads.

Joy was indignant, and about to take their part, when a whisper from behind a curtain near thrilled her strangely.

"Be quiet yourself, stupid man, or I won't sing! Do you hear—behave better at once."

The red-faced man, who had had his arm sharply grasped from behind the curtain, looked nonplussed a minute. Then, recovering himself (the little scene being perceived by few), he grew instantaneously milder, though placing his hat more rakishly than ever on one side of his head, by way of self-assertion. He began now to draw back the curtains one by one from before various inanely smiling waxwork figures. Then, turning the light from some strong reflecting lanterns, managed by his assistant, on each in turn, went on eloquently explaining their merits and meaning; rolling his r's as he declaimed with an unction, *r-r*-representing superfine education.

But Joy heeded not a clammy group, setting forth the story (recited at some length) of 'Amlet and the lovely, unfortunate Hophelia. She never gave a loyal glance at the Royal Family, standing life-size in real though faded ball-dresses, and all wearing bigger or lesser gilded coronets. The ghastly horrors of the last celebrated murder were lost upon her; though the murderer's head was shown on one black-draped pedestal glaring at his pale victim's face on another (the latter being represented with a red gash on his forehead, "to give the company present a hexcellent idea of the sufferings of this pore gentleman").

Joy could heed nothing, fix her eyes on nothing, but the curtain from whence had come that sharp whisper.

"You are not well, I think; it is very hot and stuffy. Would you like to come away? There is nothing, after all, to be seen here," asked Blyth, in a low tone, in her ear.

"No, no! He said we were to wait for some music, didn't he? We'll not go just yet; at least, unless you wish it, Blyth."

So Blyth, marveling, and having come to the disgusted conclusion in his own mind that he was a fool for his pains, waited of course patiently at his dear sovereign's bidding.

They had still to wait some time.

Once more Blyth asked Joy presently, if she would now like to come away. And—hesitating, with a sensation of faintness stealing over her, not so much from the heat and closeness of the place as from an indescribable disappointment and heart-sinking, when yet—no, surely!—she had not allowed herself to think, expect anything—she again answered,

"Shall we just wait to see it all ended? Unless you very much mind, dear Blyth."

At last the showman had gone round all the waxworks in their separately draped little stalls. The curtains had been drawn back from all but one side; that where Joy still kept her eyes fixed in a fascinated way, while her ears were strained to catch the slightest sound, though all behind there was now still.

"And now, ladies and gents, for the last and crowning attraction of this performance. The gifted Countess Maddalena, a Spanish lady of high descent, who has condescended for a while to 'onor the boards of our Royal Traveling Theater as a bright, particular star, will now sing a native song in the costume of an Indian princess."

With a sharp rattle the curtains were pulled back from the end. There was revealed a tiny, low stage, the interior draped as a tent, with bright, Eastern-looking colored stuff. And, on a low divan of cushions, the light thrown full upon her, sat—Magdalen!

CHAPTER LVII.

“While sadly I roam, I regret my dear home,
Where lads and young lasses are making the hay;
The merry bells ring, and the birds sweetly sing,
And maidens and meadows are pleasant and gay.
Oh, it's home, dearest home,
It's home I fain would be!
Home, dearest home, in the North country.
For the oak, and the ash, and the bonny ivy-tree,
They grow best at home in the North country.”

Old Ballad.

Joy had gripped Blyth's arm tight, and leaned heavily upon it for support. But she did not speak or move on seeing her mother. He, for his part, stood steady as a rock, though feeling most pitifully for the heart beating painfully beside him. The semi-darkness in which they all were crowded together in the tent concealed them from observation; and both felt, without a word, that as yet they must not betray themselves.

Magdalen was dressed in a fantastic garb of crimson petticoat and black velvet bodice, that might have been supposed originally Italian, but for fringes of gilt, glittering sequins fastened here and there, which jingled and tinkled as she bent forward now—not rising, but bowing with a sort of careless grace in answer to the shufflings and murmurs of curiosity, and some encouraging hand-claps from her little audience in the twilight tent. Her eyes gleamed so keenly from under a white head-dress, adorned with false jewels, as she gazed forward, that Blyth and Joy felt as if *she must see them*. And yet she did not; her gaze wandered restlessly on all around.

Then, with a weary air that she seemed at no trouble to disguise, the be-tinseled countess took up a mandolin that lay on an old leopard-skin rug at her feet, and carelessly drawing out a prelude from the strings, began the song two listening there knew so well, “Taza be taza.”

Moment by moment, the well-known air and her own voice seemed to excite the singer's feelings, however. The old artistic spirit, only dormant till then, broke forth again. Her eye flashed; her voice grew clearer and stronger, her whole form took a momentary fire and grace of youth, it almost seemed, for a few fleeting moments, as, striking her hand passionately now and again on the wood of the instrument, drawing out deep sounds, and then moving her fingers rapidly up and down the strings in a dreamy sweet-tinkling, almost laughing accompaniment, Magdalen chanted the old, old love song of Hafiz.

An honest burst of applause drowned the last notes as they lingeringly died away. Despite the shufflings, hoarse “Brayvo's,” violent stamping of umbrellas, and thick sticks on the ground and such-like marks of want of refinement in the criticism, it was good, genuine praise.

As such Magdalen felt it, with the quick magnetism of relations always established between true orator, actor, or singer and audience who so greatly influence each other. She bowed and bowed again, and smiled with just such a delighted air as Blyth and Joy remembered so well seeing her wear in the glen—when, hidden in the bushes, they first saw her sing and dance to an imaginary crowd of spectators. For the moment she believed herself a star, a prima-donna, at the height of her triumphs! The traveling tent was a great theater ringing with acclamations!

A few moments of gratified silence. Magdalen sat smiling as in a dream. Then the noisy calls, clappings, and stamping burst forth again from the crowd, eager for another song; the red-faced manager anxiously moved as if to attract the singer's attention, but, thinking better of it, stopped himself.

"Best not, Bill," he muttered, replying to the urgings of his assistant, "this werry partic'lar star of ours might fly out upon me, you know. A star, he, he! Humph, more like a sky-rocket. The countess is in one of her humors to-night and *wants humoring*, I can tell ye. My arm is sore yet."

Hush! Silence! She has begun again.

But it is an old English ballad this time.

"A north-country maid up to London next stray'd,
Although with her nature it did not agree;
She wept and she sigh'd, and she bitterly cried,
I wish once again in the North I could be."

So on in the simple, well-known words telling of homesickness, longing, pining for the fresh air, the free life, the love left behind her, of the dear ones away up yonder. What is the matter? The singer's voice has begun to grow fainter, to falter; the sadness of the words is infecting her own heart.

Suddenly—as if trying to rouse to a last effort and find relief in expression—Magdalen burst forth with all her powers, but in a wail of infinite pathos! such sadness as made any mothers there hold their babies tighter clasped to their breasts, and brought tears to the eyes of some.

"For it's home, dearest home,
It's home I fain would be!

Home, dearest home, in the North country.

Oh, the oak, and the ash, and the bonny ivy-tree,
They grew best at home in the North country!"

The mandolin dropped from Magdalen's hand. Slowly she rose to her feet and stood dumb, with a sort of awakening horror in her eyes, facing the crowd.

In that moment, as so often before, the mask of madness seemed fallen from her face; a veil from her understanding. She loathed the eyes upon her; despised herself.

The manager gave a hasty signal. His startled assistant instantly began moving one of the lanterns behind, to divert the public attention from the dazed woman at once, and so flashed the light full upon the audience.

A sharp cry rang from the little stage.

Magdalen threw up her arms wildly, and calling "Joy! Joy!" fell

sideways prone, with her head buried among the cushions of her couch.

The curtains were hastily pulled before the stage again. The crowd was pushed, urged, persuaded outside by the hotly bustling showmen, deaf to all expostulations or kindly troublesome inquiries.

In a few minutes the tent was almost empty.

"Take me home, Joy; take me back to the cottage—to Cold-home," Magdalen was whispering, with her head on her daughter's lap. "Take me to-night, do you hear?" with something of her old imperiousness. "That dreadful man has made enough money by me. I always told him I should leave when I pleased."

At a little distance, by the platform steps, now deserted, another conversation was passing.

"Well, sir, of course, it is a tremendous sacrifice for *us*! Such a thing on a country tour as perhaps no manager but me, no, sir! would be generous enough to allow. No, I don't say the 'countess' signed any agreement exactly. Know her, sir? Wouldn't put pen to paper, so suspicious; no, nor let herself be bound in any way. Quite the 'aughty lady! just so. She did say, when we came across her near Dover, that she was struck by the superior style of my Royal Traveling Show; and that, if I was likely to come into these parts on our tour, she would like to travel in my company. But still—"

Blyth stilled all the objections of the generous manager. The latter, indeed, after a certain check had been safely inclosed in a greasy leathern pocket-book inside his own breast-pocket, was good-natured enough in speeding his late star and her newly found protectors on their way.

"Poor soul! quite in a dangerous state of disrepair in the hupper story at times, though always the lady! Will be best with friends," he whispered, significantly laying his finger down his red nose. "But we must hurry, sir. Bustle up there, Bill, bustle. We travel at night, sir, when the roads are more free, and by to-morrow morning we must be nearly arrived at our next destination."

And truly, when the lights of Moortown were all out, and the little town hushed after its unwonted excitement, while Blyth's dog-cart, with three figures on it now, was driving swiftly down the Chad valley in the darkness, the square round the old market-cross was once more empty.

Seven great yellow vans were rumbling in a southern direction, having

"folded their tents like the Arabs,"

and silently gone away.

For some time after, the talk of those who had been at the fair often turned on the Royal Show, and the foreign singer especially. Then little by little the remembrance of the yellow vans faded, as of the strange countess, supposed to have gone away with them.

CHAPTER LVIII.

"The same old home,
 The same old house,
 With moss and houseleek overgrown;
 And surely 'tis the self-same mouse
 That from the wainscot shyly peers.
 The flowers, bees, creepers, all the same!
 No weather-stain our eyes can lack.
 Where is the change we inly blame?
 'Tis in ourselves, alack! alack!
 The years have sped,
 Our youth has fled."

THE next day, once more a faint blue smoke rose in the morning and evening from the chimney of Cold-home. Any one nearing the porch would have seen that the great rusty padlock was gone which had been fastened across two staples in the door and post by young Berrington's own hands, for additional security to the deserted house.

That was all to be seen of change. Yet the cottage was once more inhabited by its old inmates. The old still life had begun there again.

But how should any one in the country-side know that news, for weeks to come? The little brown house was so lonely, and had a reputation of being haunted now, moreover; and the glen was so little frequented. Even the swallows were not disturbed. They had reared some young broods in nests between the very door and lintel in peace.

True, there was the lantern at night, which, if now lit, according to old custom, would have told its silent tale by the red light gleaming over the broken wan water, and illumining rocks and trees here and there, to leave the rest in deeper shadows.

But there was no longer, now, need for a lantern.

During the past summer Blyth Berrington had caused a little foot-bridge with a stout hand-rail to be laid across the Chad by the ford. He had made the bridge soon after Rachel Estonia came to stay at the farm; for, until this was done, Joy had herself gone up every evening to light the lantern in the little deserted house. And the way was long for the young girl—although, indeed, Blyth had always gone with her in protection.

Magdalen had with difficulty been induced to sleep through the few dark hours of the first night at the Red House. Only the thought of seeing Rachel, and "giving her a little surprise," she said—with a low, light laugh like that of a child—had at last so tempted her.

And then, when the crisis so dreaded by Blyth and Joy had come—when the young girl, in fear and trembling as to the result of the meeting between the two sisters, had stolen upstairs to wake Rachel in her dark bedroom, and break the wonderful news to her gently—and when Rachel, trembling now very much in her turn, but marvelously self-restrained from years of habit, had crept down the creaking stairs softly with Joy, not to waken the good old farmer in

his sick-room, and had come face to face with the sister so long sought and greatly loved, at last—why, then, Magdalen, after receiving Rachel's close embrace, in which her great emotion, though repressed with effort, was still felt, and gratefully answering with a light, quick kiss on either cheek, which was a sign of effusive affection in her, only said,

"Well, are you surprised to see me back? I had a strange fancy, do you know, Rachel. I thought at Rome one night that I heard you calling me—calling me from far, far away. A silly idea, wasn't it? But I turned homeward after that, and here I am."

And they answered nothing, but held their peace.

Magdalen was too restless to sleep that night, though she lay down beside Rachel, at the latter's earnest entreaties. But she could not be long still; the old disquiet, the old feeling that she needed to roam in the open air and large silence of the hills, roused her by the glimmer of dawn.

"Up then crew the red, red cock,
And up and crew the gray;
The eldest to the youngest said,
'Tis time we were away."

At Magdalen's bidding, Rachel had asked for the keys of the cottage from Blyth, before he had said good-night to them a few hours ago. They lay outside her door now—a heavy, rusty lump of iron—as the sisters stole out in the early gloaming.

Blyth had asked leave to go with them and help them at the cottage. But Magdalen had so turned away, silent, with a little shuddering movement of her shoulders expressing dislike of strange company, that Rachel hastily refused, with an expressive look of thanks to the young man.

The sisters wore again their long, black cloaks and little hoods. Magdalen had never parted from hers all the year she had been away, but carried them in a bundle.

"I wanted to have it ready for when I came back," she whispered, with a little air of pride at her own foresight as she displayed it. "Where is yours, Rachel? Oh, you must put it on too. The people round will never know I have been away. It will all be just the old life again together. I am glad to come back to it."

The cottage was in all respects just as it had been left after Magdalen's flight and Rachel's hurried departure in illness. Only for a layer of dust over everything, it seemed to have been deserted but yesterday.

By evening Blyth came toward the little brown house under the cliff, and waited outside at the Logan-stone for Joy; because he saw Magdalen's dark figure wandering down from the upper glen, under covert of trees and bushes, with a secret air. It seemed to him, almost, as if neither of the wisht sisters had ever gone away.

In the early morning Joy had gone up to the cottage, carrying the provisions that, as she guessed, Magdalen's impatience had not suffered Rachel to wait for. All day the young girl stayed with her aunt silently helping her to clean, rub, and scour all in the little house to the old spotless perfection. All day long Magdalen was

rambling alone out on the heathery moors, or down the glen among the hawthorns by the waterfall.

Rachel and Joy spoke hardly a word to each other. They had drawn so close together in the past year, and were so dear to each other, and now—

Joy had said,

“*Must* the old life begin again for you? It ought not, it shall not. I will come every day—”

“Hush, dear, it must!” Rachel replied. “You have been my sunshine! it is a blessing to look back upon! But *she*, Magdalen, has taken such a hold on my life, we seemed so ordained to be bound together, that it is a sacred duty laid upon me from Heaven, I believe, to give her my whole thoughts and powers, as she wishes, to the end. At times, it has seemed to me as if she could not die—would never venture down into the river of death—unless I came too. A wrong fancy! She will have a better guide, then. Still, it often made me feel, even when we thought her lost on the moors, that she could not be really gone from earth without me.”

And now, at sunset, Blyth had come to seek his betrothed, and Joy, shading her eyes, presently came out to look for him.

“Speak to my mother a minute,” she said. “She wishes so much to thank you.” (Nay, that was Joy’s own sweet persuasion, as Blyth very well knew; but he honored the small, loving pretense.)

Magdalen, sitting in the little porch, with her hood pulled over her face, being perhaps confused in her own mind between past and present, perhaps playing at trying to restore her own feelings—who can say?—rose with dignified grace and gave him her hand.

“You wish to marry my daughter, Juanita da Silva, I am told,” she said. “Well, you are a worthy young man, and as I hear you have got gold-mines in Australia—or, what, Joy, sheep-farms, do you say? No matter, it all means riches, wealth! So I will give my consent, as you can keep her in a position befitting her rank. Good-by, and—*be good to her!*”

She hastily turned and disappeared into the inner bedroom before Blyth could speak. Nor did he again see her, indeed, for many a day; and then—the meeting was still more strange.

But Rachel’s majestic form stood looking after the young people as they went away. Her still smile, so brave it told nothing of what was passing in her heart, seemed yet to lighten upon them as they halted in the distance, and beckoned their last greetings from the Logan-stone.

Ah! and yet it was so hard, they thought together; so hard for her to have tasted some of the happiness of domestic life and requited affection without constant fears; yet now, to have to take up the old burden again, and travel on once more the weary old road!

But how did they know whether Rachel Estonia felt it so? If little has been said of her inner feelings of late, it is because of such spirits as hers there is little to say, unless when great trials or duties call forth their powers. She had seemed to herself in a dream, relieved of her heavy duty, yet wandering ever to find it again. There was no place fitted in the world for her, unless she might once more undertake some weighty task—so used had she been to such.

And now, in the browning twilight, there came a rustle behind her; Magdalen's breath was on her cheek.

"So they are gone! Ah, it is better; I am so tired of seeing many faces, and hearing talk. Silence! liberty! that is what I want; and you always liked what I liked, Rachel. It will be such a great rest. The old life is best for me, after all."

"But you were happy while away, sister?"

(Rachel used the old term, once fancifully begun by Magdalen, who grew wary of hearing their names mutually reiterated, she said.)

"Yes, yes; very happy in a way," Magdalen musingly replied. "It was all like a dream, traveling, and the new scenes and people, sights and crowds and music. I felt like a child at times, straying down the primrose-path, you know, and gathering flowers; and often I was half frightened at times, being alone. Then it seemed to me as if you were somehow appointed my guide to heaven, and that you would be sure to call me back, and look for me before I had gone too far. That was not the narrow, right path, was it? Ah, I fear I have been a silly stray sheep for you to watch over, poor Rachel! Well, but now I mean to try to be good, and follow you wherever you wish, dear; I do *indeed*."

Summer had passed into autumn, and the yellow stubble-fields were empty, while the stock-yards and granaries were full.

The Red House was just as full of gladness and health, in a quiet manner of rejoicing. For old Farmer Berrington had taken a new lease of life, so the doctors owned, with astonishment. And, indeed, he did, thereafter, live hale and hearty, however heavy, to a still riper, good old age before he fell asleep; and his mortal remains were laid beside those of his forefathers.

And, for more good news, Blyth and Joy Berrington, his wife, had come back, after a short and happy time that they had gone away together, following their quiet marriage by license (to avoid gossip) in the nearest large town.

They might indeed have stayed away longer, for it was lovely weather, with a soft, warm sun by day and only mild hoar-frost at night; and the country they wandered in was one of lakes, and high mountains, and rural, old-fashioned inns, delightful and new to both; and lastly they were not too new to each other's way to feel anything but happy and at ease and perfectly trustful of each other under whatever little trials of travel might happen.

But one morning Joy was uneasy. And as she could not shake off the strange impression, she told Blyth presently of a dream that seemed to haunt her. She had imagined she awoke in the dead of the past night, in the hour when the deepest sleep falls upon men, feeling a cold air blow over her face.

And then—though it was quite dark—she, opening her eyes, saw her mother sitting on the bed at her feet like a white, illuminated shadow.

Magdalen smiled at her with her old winning smile, and said,

"We were not as much to each other in life as we should have been, dear child. It was my fault—but it is all made right now! Go back to Rachel—she needs you!"

Thereupon, it seemed to Joy that she knew no more until she awoke in the glad morning with the sun shining and the birds sing-

ing. So, therefore, she could not really have wakened to have slept again so immediately, as Blyth pointed out.

Nevertheless, argue it as he might, Joy, though dutifully agreeing in his every word, felt still as uneasy all the same. It was so true that at any moment Rachel might want her; would allow no other help (if even hers!) were Magdalen suffering in one of her sad periodical attacks! And Blyth, while proving to her that such imaginary visions were only the effect of a ray of moonshine seen between waking and sleeping, or some such other fanciful cause, nevertheless was so willing to relieve her anxiety that they prepared to start on their return journey at once.

So, two days later, the young husband and wife arrived at mid-day at the Red House. There, in spite of their arrival being unexpected, a most hearty home-coming welcome greeted them. The old farmer and Hannah, the men on the place, the dogs and horses, nay, the very fowls and bees and flowers seemed all to rejoice. It was a spontaneous outburst of gladness, and a cheerful, willing, running hither and thither to get all to rights for the young master and mistress, surely a hundred-fold better than any more elaborate preparations of honor.

"And is all well up at the cottage?" Joy asked at once, striving to conceal her anxiety.

"All is well! could not be better," replied Hannah, cheerfully. "I was up there four days ago, with a basket, and my own dear lady, your mother, dearie, came and kissed me. Which was wonderful for her—but she was tired-like, and soft-hearted, the creature!"

So all was right.

"We will go up there this evening," said Blyth, cheerily.

CHAPTER LIX.

"My heart is growing cauld,
And will be caulder still,
And sair, sair in the fauld
Will be the winter's chill.
The peats were yet to ca',
Our sheep they were to smear,
When my a' passed awa',
In the fa' o' the year.

"Be kind, O Heaven abune,
To ane sae wae and lane,
And tak' her hamewards sune,
In pity o' her maen.
Lang ere the March winds blaw,
May she, far, far frae here,
Meet them a' that's awa',
Sin' the fa' o' the year."

The Widow's Lament.

AND so the pair, the young man and woman, came that evening by the upper path over the hills (because Blyth had some new sheep there) to where they could look from the high ground of the moor down on the great rock, almost directly below them, at the glen's mouth, and the little cottage sheltering under it.

"There is no smoke from the chimney; yet it ought to be their

time for supper," said Joy, with troubled solicitude in her voice, as she looked down at Cold-home—fit name, truly, always, for the small moor-stone dwelling.

"Your mother will not willingly see me, so I had better wait at the Logan-stone till whatever time you like to come home," said Blyth, with the steadfast cheerfulness that made all the time or trouble he gave seem as things of nought. And yet, in his mind's core, he hoped she would not be very long; and likewise reflected that, though a man may be patient, yet he must smoke.

So Blyth was wending his way toward the river, when, just as he had filled his pipe, something caused him to stand still. The she-goat belonging to the cottage was springing wildly, and rattling her chain, fastened a tree, as if half maddened, as he approached her.

Then he noticed she had not been milked lately, and that all the grass round her tether was nibbled close and trampled.

Blyth was very fond of animals; so he made haste to release the poor beast, when a low call from the cottage reached his ear. He knew it was Joy; and, hastening to her summons, found her standing, looking pale and frightened, before the cottage.

"Oh, Blyth, the door is locked," she said, as he came up. "What does it mean? They are always at home at this hour; but I can make no one hear me."

"They are up the glen, or down by the river, dear. They can't be far off."

"They are *not* up the glen." Joy was half beside herself now with growing fears. "Look, the red curtain is drawn across the window, as it only is at night. And, see there! a spider has spun its thread over the doorpost. Oh, they cannot have *gone away and left us again!*"

"Come round to the bed chamber window, and call," cried Blyth, excited at sight of that spider's thread. "If they are there, your mother ought to know your voice, whether she is ill or not. Miss Rachel will."

A white blind was drawn closely down over the little window at the other end of the cottage. Nothing could be seen; all was mute as the grave from inside those moor-stone walls. Joy, nevertheless, raised her fresh young voice in a thrilling call.

"Mother! mother! *Aunt Rachel!* It is I, Joy, your own child. Hear me; answer me."

Then came from inside a low, faint sound. It was human breath, a voice; but its utterance only reached the outside of the walls no louder than a sigh. Both the listeners looked eagerly at each other; bent their ears again—nothing more.

Blyth waited no longer, but ran round to the door, and, snatching up a large stone, gave two or three violent blows against the lock, and then, using all the strength of his own broad-shouldered body, burst into the cottage. The first object he stumbled over in the half-gloom was a basket of provisions; the self-same Hannah had last brought. But he could not stop to look about, for Joy had darted before him into the inner room, while he more softly followed.

What a sight met their eyes!

The westering sun striking full on the little window, and passing.

through the white blind, illumined the scene with a pure, yet ghostly light.

On the low truckle-bed lay Magdalen, her hands folded on her breast. Or was it really she, so still, so pallid, so small? She was a corpse. And at her side sat a silent, dark mourner on the ground, bending over her sister with her own head leaned against the wall; speechless, motionless as her dead, with living eyes that saw nothing and ears that seemed not to hear the footsteps that entered. So Rachel Estonia sat, like a statue, and, as the moments went by, never stirred or sighed or took her gaze (if indeed she saw) off Magdalen's face.

Joy's first outcry and impulse of anguish and pitying love frozen by that awful stillness, she caught Blyth's arm, and, clinging to him, they gazed together in moments of silence that seemed almost hours.

Magdalen was all laid out in spotless white, with not a wrinkle either on the fresh sheets on which she lay, and that were folded so delicately corpse-wise on her faintly outlined form. Plainly Rachel Estonia's strength had not failed her till the last needful services had been done for the sister she loved so truly in life. Then she must have sunk down here, and so stayed—how long? None ever knew! But Magdalen had been dead perhaps, three days and nights.

Joy knelt by the living, whom, after all—yes, indeed—she had loved the best! folded her in her arms, caressed her, wept over her, laying her own warm, tear-wet cheek against that dear one. Yet Rachel still seemed in a trance. Though Joy's voice in that first call had power to bring back her spirit from where it seemed to have wandered out from her body, striving vainly to follow her beloved dead in thought while yet bound to the flesh, now she had relapsed into unconsciousness of all earthly objects around her.

At last Blyth took her up bodily in his arms and gently carried her into the other room. There while he hurried for help to the Red House Farm, Joy watched and tended her with all the love and poignant grief of her warm young heart, rising often to self-accusing pangs of keenest remorse. But she wronged herself.

In intervening moments her better sense told her this weird call had not come through any neglect of her own. And it comforted her not a little to think that, in the vision she had seen, her mother had worn no accusing look, but, on the contrary, had seemed to bless her.

Blyth had come back in utmost haste from the farm, and old Hannah with him; but the twilight was already falling, and to Joy it seemed hours that she had sat there alone with Rachel and her dead mother. They brought restoratives; and, after a while, with much pains, had the satisfaction of seeing Rachel's dark eyes light up in a gleam of consciousness and love as they rested on Joy, while her lips moved.

"Dear! my heart's child!" she uttered in broken murmurs, "my task on earth is finished now; I am going to rest. Where is your Blyth?"

They brought Blyth to her, who had been sitting in the porch in the outside summer darkness, guarding the little house, while the river could be heard flowing by, and the stars shone soft in the clear

sky. Rachel looked so still, with a wonderful sweetness on her face and holy calm lighting her steadfast eyes, while her low voice seemed to come from far, far away, that Blyth almost felt as if her spirit already belonged to another world. She looked at him and faintly said,

“You will be good to Joy?”

“As God is my witness, I will try to make her happy while my life lasts,” said the young man, solemnly.

A smile of ineffable satisfaction came on Rachel Estonia's face, as she sunk back with her head on Joy's breast.

She did not speak again collectedly; though her lips sometimes moved, and, bending down, they could catch broken, loving expressions, as her memory strayed to each of the few persons who had been the little world of this noble soul; words treasured by them afterward as blessings. She never mentioned Magdalen, never Gaspard, though once Hannah heard her say “Poor Peter,” and understood her; no one else.

The night wore on; the still small hours came, when the earth is coldest and the tide of human vitality lowest. Then—all three thought her half sleeping—they aroused to be aware that they no longer heard her murmur, saw her move. Bending their ears, feeling her pulse, no breath, no beat of vitality answered the awe-struck, fearful expectancy. So, sweetly and calmly, Rachel Estonia had gone on her unknown journey, while the night sky was clear, the stars shining, the air so still. Surely, of the many who died that night on the million-peopled world, no spirit passed more happily from its bodily covering, its poor tenement of clay, than did hers. Surely she was a true sister!

Where the little lone church stands hidden between wood and hills, in its wild and solitary nook; there, where its acre of graveyard touches the moor's edge, rise three low waves of turf. They are a little apart from the rest of the sleeping congregation; as in life, so in death. But the yellow broom bends its butterfly blossoms over the fence, and the heather and gorse smell sweetest here. One of these three lies by itself, a small wooden cross at its head bearing only these two letters, “G. S.,” half effaced by time. But a red rosebush, like those down at the Red House, scattering its crimson petals to every breeze, seems to think itself the better living remembrance of the dead below.

Side by side, at the foot of this grave, sleep the two sisters, who in death were not divided; two plain moor-stone slabs, bearing their names—*Rachel! Magdalen!* No more. Except, indeed, that a white-rosebush is planted by each, and these blow, however shyly in the strong upland air, yet sweetly, in summer weather.

Joy Berrington planted the roses; her loving hands, and, in after-years, those of the fair-haired, and some dark-eyed, children she thus piously taught, tended these three graves with loving care. Nevertheless, the moor-folk still look that way askance and wonder; and will tell strange legends of the wish sisters, and of a ghostly light still seen on wild dark nights at Cold-home ford, though the cottage has long fallen into ruin. A light that did good while the sisters lived could not prove themselves evil, some few fair-judging minds stoutly declared at times; the rest said, “Ay, but it was

plainly only a deed of repentance for some former great sin in their lives." Let them say what they will; little does it matter to those who knew the true story and brave spirit of Rachel Estonia. Little would she care!

Blyth Berrington and Joy, his faithful wife, rich in all that wise men have agreed to consider the chiefest good things on earth, live blessing and blessed. If some ever ask who was Mistress Berrington, it is always confidently asserted that she was a far-away cousin, and a well-dowered one, of her good husband. Young Steenie Hawkshaw, in a drunken fit long ago before her marriage, had been known to hint at some wild tale to the contrary. But he was dead, and his old father too. And so the story, whatever it was, died out.

But in all the country, far or near, there was no more happy homestead than that of the Red House.

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194 "So Near, and Yet So Far!"... 10	
278 For Life and Love.....	10
481 The House That Jack Built.... 10	

F. Anstey's Works.

59 Vice Versâ.....	20
225 The Giant's Robe.....	20
503 The Tinted Venus. A Farical Romance.....	10

R. M. Ballantyne's Works.

89 The Red Eric.....	10
95 The Fire Brigade.....	10
96 Erling the Bold.....	10

Anne Beale's Works.

188 Idonea.....	20
199 The Fisher Village.....	10

Basil's Works.

344 "The Wearing of the Green" .. 20	
547 A Coquette's Conquest.....	20
585 A Drawn Game.....	20

M. Betham-Edwards's Works.

273 Love and Mirage; or, The Waiting on an Island.....	10
579 The Flower of Doom, and Other Stories.....	10
594 Doctor Jacob.....	20

Walter Besant's Works.

97 All in a Garden Fair.....	20
137 Uncle Jack.....	10
140 A Glorious Fortune.....	10
146 Love Finds the Way, and Other Stories. By Besant and Rice 10	
230 Dorothy Forster.....	20
324 In Luck at Last.....	10

William Black's Works.

1 Yolande.....	20
18 Shandon Bells.....	20
21 Sunrise: A Story of These Times.....	20
23 A Princess of Thule.....	20
39 In Silk Attire.....	20
44 Macleod of Dare.....	20
49 That Beautiful Wretch.....	20
50 The Strange Adventures of a Phaeton.....	20
70 White Wings: A Yachting Romance.....	10
78 Madcap Violet.....	20
81 A Daughter of Heth.....	20
124 Three Feathers.....	20
125 The Monarch of Mincing Lane. 20	
126 Kilmeny.....	20
138 Green Pastures and Piccadilly. 20	
265 Judith Shakespeare: Her Love Affairs and Other Adventures 20	
472 The Wise Women of Inverness. 10	
627 White Heather.....	20

R. D. Blackmore's Works.

67	Lorna Doone. 1st half.....	20
67	Lorna Doone. 2d half.....	20
427	The Remarkable History of Sir Thomas Upmore, Bart., M. P.	20

Miss M. E. Braddon's Works.

35	Lady Audley's Secret.....	20
56	Phantom Fortune.....	20
74	Aurora Floyd.....	20
110	Under the Red Flag.....	10
153	The Golden Calf.....	20
204	Vixen.....	20
211	The Octoroon.....	10
234	Barbara; or, Splendid Misery..	20
263	An Ishmaelite.....	20
315	The Mistletoe Bough. Edited by Miss Braddon.....	20
434	Wyllard's Weird.....	20
478	Diavola; or, Nobody's Daugh- ter. Part I.....	20
478	Diavola; or, Nobody's Daugh- ter. Part II.....	20
480	Married in Haste. Edited by Miss M. E. Braddon.....	20
487	Put to the Test. Edited by Miss M. E. Braddon.....	20
488	Joshua Haggard's Daughter....	20
489	Rupert Godwin.....	20
495	Mount Royal.....	20
496	Only a Woman. Edited by Miss M. E. Braddon.....	20
497	The Lady's Mile.....	20
498	Only a Clod.....	20
499	The Cloven Foot.....	20
511	A Strange World.....	20
515	Sir Jasper's Tenant.....	20
524	Strangers and Pilgrims.....	20
529	The Doctor's Wife.....	20
542	Fenton's Quest.....	20
544	Cut by the County; or, Grace Darnel.....	10
548	The Fatal Marriage, and The Shadow in the Corner.....	10
549	Dudley Carleon; or, The Broth- er's Secret, and George Caul- field's Journey.....	10
552	Hostages to Fortune.....	20
553	Birds of Prey.....	20
554	Charlotte's Inheritance. (Se- quel to "Birds of Prey").....	20
557	To the Bitter End.....	20
559	Taken at the Flood.....	20
560	Asphodel.....	20
561	Just as I am; or, A Living Lie	20
567	Dead Men's Shoes.....	20
570	John Marchmont's Legacy.....	20

**Works by Charlotte M. Braeme,
Author of "Dora Thorne,"**

19	Her Mother's Sin.....	10
51	Dora Thorne.....	20
54	A Broken Wedding-Ring.....	20
68	A Queen Amongst Women.....	10
69	Madolin's Lover.....	20
73	Redeemed by Love.....	20
76	Wife in Name Only.....	20
79	Wedded and Parted.....	10
92	Lord Lynne's Choice.....	10

148	Thorns and Orange-Blossoms..	10
190	Romance of a Black Veil.....	10
220	Which Loved Him Best?.....	10
237	Repented at Leisure.....	20
249	"Prince Charlie's Daughter" ..	10
250	Sunshine and Roses; or, Di- ana's Discipline.....	10
254	The Wife's Secret, and Fair but False.....	10
283	The Sin of a Lifetime.....	10
287	At War With Herself.....	10
288	From Gloom to Sunlight.....	10
291	Love's Warfare.....	10
292	A Golden Heart.....	10
293	The Shadow of a Sin.....	10
294	Hilda.....	10
295	A Woman's War.....	10
296	A Rose in Thorns.....	10
297	Hilary's Folly.....	10
299	The Fatal Lilies, and A Bride from the Sea.....	10
300	A Gilded Sin, and A Bridge of Love.....	10
303	Ingledew House, and More Bit- ter than Death.....	10
304	In Cupid's Net.....	10
305	A Dead Heart, and Lady Gwen- doline's Dream.....	10
306	A Golden Dawn, and Love for a Day.....	10
307	Two Kisses, and Like no Other Love.....	10
308	Beyond Pardon.....	20
411	A Bitter Atonement.....	20
433	My Sister Kate.....	10
459	A Woman's Temptation.....	20
460	Under a Shadow.....	20
465	The Earl's Atonement.....	20
466	Between Two Loves.....	20
467	A Struggle for a Ring.....	20
469	Lady Damer's Secret.....	20
470	Evelyn's Folly.....	20
471	Thrown on the World.....	20
476	Between Two Sins.....	10
516	Put Asunder; or, Lady Castle- maine's Divorce.....	20
576	Her Martyrdom.....	20

Charlotte Bronte's Works.

15	Jane Eyre.....	20
57	Shirley.....	20

Rhoda Broughton's Works.

86	Belinda.....	20
101	Second Thoughts.....	20
227	Nancy.....	20

Robert Buchanan's Works.

145	"Storm-Beaten;" God and The Man.....	20
154	Annan Water.....	20
181	The New Abelard.....	10
398	Matt: A Tale of a Caravan....	10

Captain Fred Burnaby's Works.

375	A Ride to Khiva.....	20
384	On Horseback Through Asia Minor.....	20

E. Fairfax Byrrne's Works.

521	Entangled.....	20
538	A Fair Country Maid.....	20

Hall Caine's Works.

445	The Shadow of a Crime.....	20
520	She's All the World to Me.....	10

Rosa Nouchette Carey's Works.

215	Not Like Other Girls.....	20
396	Robert Ord's Atonement.....	20
551	Barbara Heathcote's Trial.....	20
608	For Lilius.....	20

Wilkie Collins's Works.

52	The New Magdalen.....	10
102	The Moonstone.....	20
167	Heart and Science.....	20
168	No Thoroughfare. By Dickens and Collins.....	10
175	Love's Random Shot.....	10
233	"I Say No;" or, The Love-Let- ter Answered.....	20
508	The Girl at the Gate.....	10
591	The Queen of Hearts.....	20
613	The Ghost's Touch, and Percy and the Prophet.....	10
623	My Lady's Money.....	10

Hugh Conway's Works.

240	Called Back.....	10
251	The Daughter of the Stars, and Other Tales.....	10
301	Dark Days.....	10
302	The Blatchford Bequest.....	10
502	Carriston's Gift.....	10
525	Paul Vargas, and Other Stories	10
543	A Family Affair....	20
601	Slings and Arrows, and Other Stories.....	10

J. Fenimore Cooper's Works.

60	The Last of the Mohicans.....	20
63	The Spy.....	20
309	The Pathfinder.....	20
310	The Prairie.....	20
318	The Pioneers; or, The Sources of the Susquehanna.....	20
349	The Two Admirals.....	20
359	The Water-Witch.....	20
361	The Red Rover.....	20
373	Wing and Wing.....	20
378	Homeward Bound; or, The Chase.....	20
379	Home as Found. (Sequel to "Homeward Bound").....	20
380	Wyandotte; or, The Hutted Knoll.....	20
385	The Headsman; or, The Ab- baye des Vignerons.....	20
394	The Bravo.....	20
397	Lionel Lincoln; or, The Leag- uer of Boston.....	20
400	The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish...	20
413	Afloat and Ashore.....	20
414	Miles Wallingford. (Sequel to "Afloat and Ashore").....	20
415	The Ways of the Hour.....	20
416	Jack Tier; or, The Florida Reef	20

419	The Chainbearer; or, The Little- page Manuscripts.....	20
420	Satanstoe; or, The Littlepage Manuscripts.....	20
421	The Redskins; or, Indian and Injin. Being the conclusion of the Littlepage Manuscripts	20
422	Precaution.....	20
423	The Sea Lions; or, The Lost Sealers.....	20
424	Mercedes of Castile; or, The Voyage to Cathay.....	20
425	The Oak-Openings; or, The Bee- Hunter.....	20
431	The Monikins.....	20

Georgiana M. Craik's Works.

450	Godfrey Helstone.....	20
606	Mrs. Hollyer.....	20

B. M. Croker's Works.

207	Pretty Miss Neville.....	20
260	Proper Pride.....	10
412	Some One Else.....	20

Alphonse Daudet's Works.

534	Jack.....	20
574	The Nabob: A Story of Parisian Life and Manners.....	20

Charles Dickens's Works.

10	The Old Curiosity Shop.....	20
22	David Copperfield. Vol. I....	20
22	David Copperfield. Vol. II....	20
24	Pickwick Papers. Vol. I.....	20
24	Pickwick Papers. Vol. II.....	20
37	Nicholas Nickleby. First half.	20
37	Nicholas Nickleby. Second half	20
41	Oliver Twist.....	20
77	A Tale of Two Cities.....	20
84	Hard Times.....	10
91	Barnaby Rudge. 1st half.....	20
91	Barnaby Rudge. 2d half.....	20
94	Little Dorrit. First half.....	20
94	Little Dorrit. Second half....	20
106	Bleak House. First half.....	20
106	Bleak House. Second half....	20
107	Dombey and Son. 1st half....	20
107	Dombey and Son. 2d half.....	20
108	The Cricket on the Hearth, and Doctor Marigold.....	10
131	Our Mutual Friend.....	40
132	Master Humphrey's Clock.....	10
152	The Uncommercial Traveler...	20
168	No Thoroughfare. By Dickens and Collins.....	10
169	The Haunted Man.....	10
437	Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit. First half.....	20
437	Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit. Second half....	20
439	Great Expectations.....	20
440	Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings.....	10
447	American Notes.....	20
448	Pictures From Italy, and The Mudfog Papers, &c.....	20
454	The Mystery of Edwin Drood..	20
456	Sketches by Boz. Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every- day People.....	20

F. Du Boisgobey's Works.

82	Sealed Lips.....	20
104	The Coral Pin.....	30
264	Piédouche, a French Detective.	10
328	Babiole, the Pretty Milliner.	
	First half.....	20
328	Babiole, the Pretty Milliner.	
	Second half.....	20
453	The Lottery Ticket.....	20
475	The Prima Donna's Husband..	20
522	Zig-Zag, the Clown; or, Steel	
	Gauntlets.....	20
523	The Consequences of a Duel. A	
	Parisian Romance.....	20

"The Duchess's" Works.

2	Molly Bawn.....	20
6	Portia.....	20
14	Airy Fairy Lilian.....	10
16	Phyllis.....	20
25	Mrs. Geoffrey.....	20
29	Beauty's Daughters.....	10
30	Faith and Unfaith.....	20
118	Loys, Lord Berresford, and	
	Eric Dering.....	10
119	Monica, and A Rose Distill'd..	10
123	Sweet is True Love.....	10
129	Rossmoyne.....	10
134	The Witching Hour, and Other	
	Stories.....	10
136	"That Last Rehearsal," and	
	Other Stories.....	10
166	Moonshine and Marguerites....	10
171	Fortune's Wheel.....	10
284	Doris.....	10
312	A Week in Killarney.....	10
342	The Baby, and One New Year's	
	Eve.....	10
390	Mildred Trevanion.....	10
404	In Durance Vile, and Other	
	Stories.....	10
486	Dick's Sweetheart.....	20
494	A Maiden All Forlorn, and Bar-	
	bara.....	10
517	A Passive Crime, and Other	
	Stories.....	10
541	"As It Fell Upon a Day.".....	10

Alexander Dumas's Works.

55	The Three Guardsmen.....	20
75	Twenty Years After.....	20
259	The Bride of Monte-Cristo. A	
	Sequel to "The Count of	
	Monte-Cristo".....	10
262	The Count of Monte-Cristo.	
	Part I.....	20
262	The Count of Monte-Cristo.	
	Part II.....	20

George Eliot's Works.

3	The Mill on the Floss.....	20
36	Adam Bede.....	20
31	Middlemarch. 1st half.....	20
31	Middlemarch. 2d half.....	20
34	Daniel Deronda. 1st half.....	20
34	Daniel Deronda. 2d half.....	20
42	Romola.....	20

B. L. Farjeon's Works.

179	Little Make-Believe.....	10
573	Love's Harvest.....	20
607	Self-Doomed.....	10
616	The Sacred Nugget.....	20

G. Manville Fenn's Works.

193	The Rosery Folk.....	10
558	Poverty Corner.....	20
587	The Parson o' Dumford.....	20
609	The Dark House.....	10

Octave Feuillet's Works.

66	The Romance of a Poor Young	
	Man.....	10
386	Led Astray; or, "La Petite	
	Comtesse".....	10

Mrs. Forrester's Works.

80	June.....	20
280	Omnia Vanitas. A Tale of So-	
	ciety.....	10
484	Although He Was a Lord, and	
	Other Tales.....	10

Jessie Fothergill's Works.

314	Peril.....	20
572	Healey.....	20

R. E. Francillon's Works.

135	A Great Heiress: A Fortune	
	in Seven Checks.....	10
319	Face to Face: A Fact in Seven	
	Fables.....	10
360	Ropes of Sand.....	20

Emile Gaboriau's Works.

7	File No. 113.....	20
12	Other People's Money.....	20
20	Within an Inch of His Life....	20
26	Monsieur Lecoq. Vol I.....	20
26	Monsieur Lecoq. Vol. II.....	20
33	The Clique of Gold.....	10
38	The Widow Lerouge.....	20
43	The Mystery of Orcival.....	20
144	Promises of Marriage.....	10

Charles Gibbon's Works.

64	A Maiden Fair.....	10
317	By Mead and Stream.....	20

Miss Grant's Works.

222	The Sun-Maid.....	20
555	Cara Roma.....	20

Thomas Hardy's Works.

139	The Romantic Adventures of	
	a Milkmaid.....	10
530	A Pair of Blue Eyes.....	20

John B. Harwood's Works.

143	One False, Both Fair.....	20
358	Within the Clasp.....	20

Mary Cecil Hay's Works.

65	Back to the Old Home.....	10
72	Old Myddelton's Money.....	20
196	Hidden Perils.....	10
197	For Her Dear Sake.....	20
224	The Arundel Motto.....	10
281	The Squire's Legacy.....	20
290	Nora's Love Test.....	20
408	Lester's Secret.....	20

Works by the Author of "Judith Wynne."

332	Judith Wynne.....	20
506	Lady Lovelace.....	20

William H. G. Kingston's Works.

117	A Tale of the Shore and Ocean.....	20
133	Peter the Whaler.....	10

Charles Lever's Works.

191	Harry Lorrequer.....	20
212	Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon. First half.....	20
212	Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon. Second half.....	20
243	Tom Burke of "Ours." First half.....	20
243	Tom Burke of "Ours." Second half.....	20

Sir E. Bulwer Lytton's Works.

40	The Last Days of Pompeii.....	20
83	A Strange Story.....	20
90	Ernest Maltravers.....	20
130	The Last of the Barons. First half.....	20
130	The Last of the Barons. Second half.....	20
162	Eugene Aram.....	20
164	Leila; or, The Siege of Grenada.....	10

George Macdonald's Works.

282	Donal Grant.....	20
325	The Portent.....	10
326	Phantastes. A Faerie Romance for Men and Women.....	10

Florence Marryat's Works.

159	A Moment of Madness, and Other Stories.....	10
183	Old Contrairy, and Other Stories.....	10
208	The Ghost of Charlotte Cray, and Other Stories.....	10
276	Under the Lilies and Roses.....	10
444	The Heart of Jane Warner.....	20
449	Peeress and Player.....	20

Captain Marryat's Works.

88	The Privateersman.....	20
272	The Little Savage.....	10

Helen B. Mathers's Works.

13	Eyre's Acquittal.....	10
221	Comin' Thro' the Rye.....	20
438	Found Out.....	10

Justin McCarthy's Works.

121	Maid of Athens.....	20
602	Camiola.....	20

Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller's Works.

267	Laurel Vane; or, The Girls' Conspiracy.....	20
268	Lady Gay's Pride; or, The Miser's Treasure.....	20
269	Lancaster's Choice.....	20
316	Sworn to Silence; or, Aline Rodney's Secret.....	20

Jean Middlemas's Works.

155	Lady Muriel's Secret.....	20
539	Silvermead.....	20

Alan Muir's Works.

172	"Golden Girls".....	20
346	Tumbledown Farm.....	10

Miss Mulock's Works.

11	John Halifax, Gentleman.....	20
245	Miss Tommy.....	10

David Christie Murray's Works.

58	By the Gate of the Sea.....	10
195	"The Way of the World".....	20
320	A Bit of Human Nature.....	10

Works by the author of "My Ducats and My Daughter."

376	The Crime of Christmas Day.....	10
596	My Ducats and My Daughter.....	20

W. E. Norris's Works.

184	Thirlby Hall.....	20
277	A Man of His Word.....	10
355	That Terrible Man.....	10
500	Adrian Vidal.....	20

Laurence Oliphant's Works.

47	Altiora Peto.....	20
537	Piccadilly.....	10

Mrs. Oliphant's Works.

45	A Little Pilgrim.....	10
177	Salem Chapel.....	20
205	The Minister's Wife.....	30
321	The Prodigals, and Their Inheritance.....	10
337	Memoirs and Resolutions of Adam Graeme of Mossgray, including some Chronicles of the Borough of Fendie.....	20
345	Madam.....	20
351	The House on the Moor.....	20
357	John.....	20
370	Lucy Crofton.....	10
371	Margaret Maitland.....	20
377	Magdalen Hepburn: A Story of the Scottish Reformation....	20

Mrs. Oliphant's Works—Continued.

402	Lilliesleaf; or, Passages in the Life of Mrs. Margaret Maitland of Sunnyside.....	20
410	Old Lady Mary.....	10
527	The Days of My Life.....	20
528	At His Gates.....	20
568	The Perpetual Curate.....	20
569	Harry Muir.....	20
603	Agnes. 1st half.....	20
603	Agnes. 2d half.....	20
604	Innocent. 1st half.....	20
604	Innocent. 2d half.....	20
605	Ombra.....	20

"Ouida's" Works.

4	Under Two Flags.....	20
9	Wanda, Countess von Szalras..	20
116	Moths.....	20
128	Afternoon and Other Sketches.	10
226	Friendship.....	20
228	Princess Napraxine.....	20
238	Pascarel.....	20
239	Signa.....	20
433	A Rainy June.....	10

James Payn's Works.

48	Thicker Than Water.....	20
186	The Canon's Ward.....	20
343	The Talk of the Town.....	20
577	In Peril and Privation.....	10
589	The Luck of the Darrells.....	20

Cecil Power's Works.

336	Philistia.....	20
611	Babylon.....	20

Mrs. Campbell Praed's Works.

428	Zéro: A Story of Monte-Carlo.	10
477	Affinities.....	10

Eleanor C. Price's Works.

173	The Foreigners.....	20
331	Gerald.....	20

Charles Reade's Works.

46	Very Hard Cash.....	20
98	A Woman-Hater.....	20
206	The Picture, and Jack of All Trades.....	10
210	Readiana: Comments on Current Events.....	10
213	A Terrible Temptation.....	20
214	Put Yourself in His Place.....	20
216	Foul Play.....	20
231	Griffith Gaunt; or, Jealousy...	20
232	Love and Money; or, A Perilous Secret.....	10
235	"It is Never Too Late to Mend." A Matter-of-Fact Romance.....	20

Mrs. J. H. Riddell's Works.

71	A Struggle for Fame.....	20
593	Berna Boyle.....	20

"Rita's" Works.

252	A Sinless Secret.....	10
446	Dame Durden.....	20
598	"Corinna." A Study.....	10
617	Like Dian's Kiss.....	20

F. W. Robinson's Works.

157	Milly's Hero.....	20
217	The Man She Cared For.....	20
261	A Fair Maid.....	20
455	Lazarus in London.....	20
590	The Courting of Mary Smith...	20

W. Clark Russell's Works.

85	A Sea Queen.....	20
109	Little Loo.....	20
180	Round the Galley Fire.....	10
209	John Holdsworth, Chief Mate..	10
223	A Sailor's Sweetheart.....	20
592	A Strange Voyage.....	20

Sir Walter Scott's Works.

28	Ivanhoe.....	20
201	The Monastery.....	20
202	The Abbot. (Sequel to "The Monastery").....	20
353	The Black Dwarf, and A Legend of Montrose.....	20
362	The Bride of Lammermoor....	20
363	The Surgeon's Daughter.....	10
364	Castle Dangerous.....	10
391	The Heart of Mid-Lothian....	20
392	Peveril of the Peak.....	20
393	The Pirate.....	20
401	Waverley.....	20
417	The Fair Maid of Perth; or, St. Valentine's Day.....	20
418	St. Ronan's Well.....	20
463	Redgauntlet. A Tale of the Eighteenth Century.....	20
507	Chronicles of the Canongate, and Other Stories.....	10

William Sime's Works.

429	Boulderstone; or, New Men and Old Populations.....	10
580	The Red Route.....	20
597	Haco the Dreamer.....	10

Hawley Smart's Works.

348	From Post to Finish. A Racing Romance.....	20
367	Tie and Trick.....	20
550	Struck Down.....	10

Frank E. Smedley's Works.

333	Frank Fairleigh; or, Scenes from the Life of a Private Pupil.....	20
562	Lewis Arundel; or, The Railroad of Life.....	20

Eugene Sue's Works.

270	The Wandering Jew. Part I...	20
270	The Wandering Jew. Part II...	20
271	The Mysteries of Paris. Part I.	20
271	The Mysteries of Paris. Part II.	20

William M. Thackeray's Works.

27	Vanity Fair.....	20
165	The History of Henry Esmond.	20
464	The Newcomes. Part I.....	20
464	The Newcomes. Part II.....	20
531	The Prime Minister (1st half)..	20
531	The Prime Minister (2d half)..	20

Annie Thomas's Works.

141	She Loved Him I.....	10
142	Jenifer	20
565	No Medium.....	10

Anthony Trollope's Works.

32	The Land Leaguers.....	20
93	Anthony Trollope's Autobiography	20
147	Rachel Ray.....	20
200	An Old Man's Love.....	10
531	The Prime Minister. 1st half..	20
531	The Prime Minister. 2d half..	20

Margaret Veley's Works.

298	Mitchelhurst Place.....	10
586	"For Percival".....	20

Jules Verne's Works.

87	Dick Sand; or, A Captain at Fifteen.....	20
100	20,000 Leagues Under the Seas.	20
368	The Southern Star; or, the Diamond Land.	20
395	The Archipelago on Fire.....	10
578	Mathias Sandorf. Illustrated. Part I.....	10
578	Mathias Sandorf. Illustrated. Part II.....	10

L. B. Walford's Works.

241	The Baby's Grandmother.....	10
256	Mr. Smith: A Part of His Life.	20
258	Cousins.....	20

F. Warden's Works.

192	At the World's Mercy.....	20
248	The House on the Marsh.....	10
286	Deldee; or, The Iron Hand....	20
482	A Vagrant Wife.....	20
556	A Prince of Darkness.....	20

E. Werner's Works.

327	Raymond's Atonement.....	20
540	At a High Price.....	20

G. J. Whyte-Melville's Works.

409	Roy's Wife.....	20
451	Market Harborough, and Inside the Bar.....	20

John Strange Winter's Works.

492	Mignon; or, Bootles' Baby. Illustrated	10
600	Houp-La. Illustrated	10

Mrs. Henry Wood's Works.

8	East Lynne.....	20
255	The Mystery.....	20
277	The Surgeon's Daughters.....	10
508	The Unholy Wish	10
513	Helen Whitney's Wedding, and Other Tales.....	10
514	The Mystery of Jessy Page, and Other Tales.....	10
610	The Story of Dorothy Grape, and Other Tales.....	10

Charlotte M. Yonge's Works.

247	The Armourer's Prentices.....	10
275	The Three Brides.....	10
535	Henrietta's Wish. A Tale.....	10
563	The Two Sides of the Shield....	20

Miscellaneous.

53	The Story of Ida. Francesca..	10
61	Charlotte Temple. Mrs. Rowson.....	10
99	Barbara's History. Amelia B. Edwards.....	20
103	Rose Fleming. Dora Russell..	10
105	A Noble Wife. John Saunders	20
111	The Little School-master Mark. J. H. Shorthouse.....	10
112	The Waters of Marah. John Hill.....	20
113	Mrs. Carr's Companion. M. G. Wightwick.....	10
114	Some of Our Girls. Mrs. C. J. Eiloart.....	20
115	Diamond Cut Diamond. T. Adolphus Trollope.....	10
120	Tom Brown's School Days at Rugby. Thomas Hughes....	20
122	Ione Stewart. Mrs. E. Lynn Linton.....	20
127	Adrian Bright. Mrs. Caddy....	20
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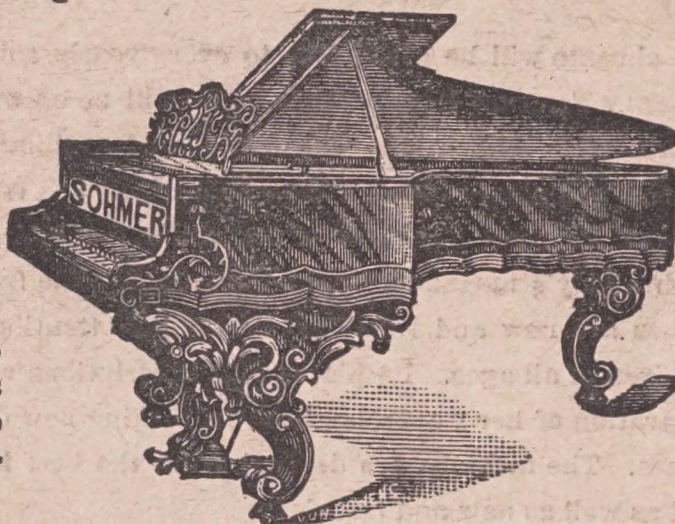
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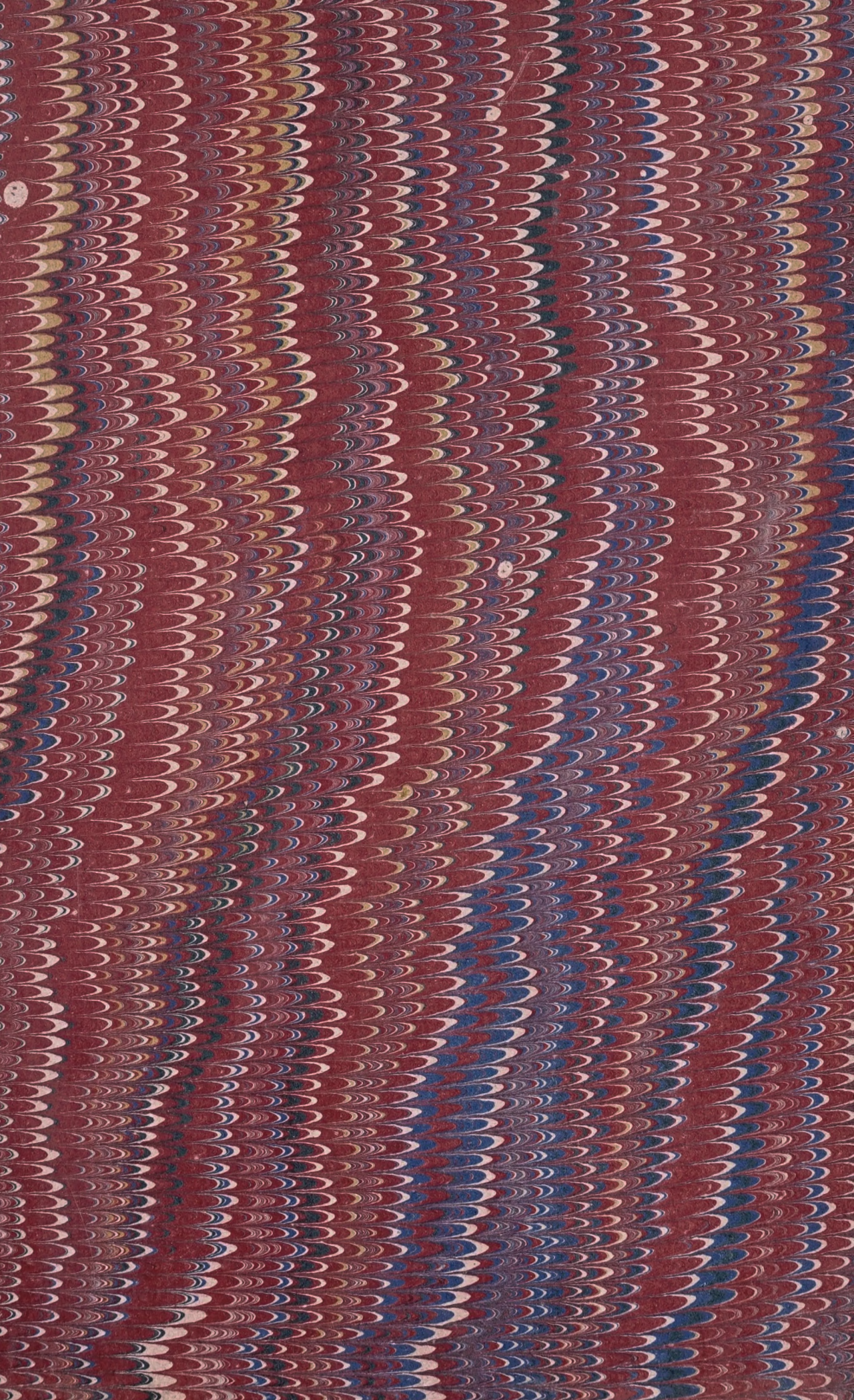
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